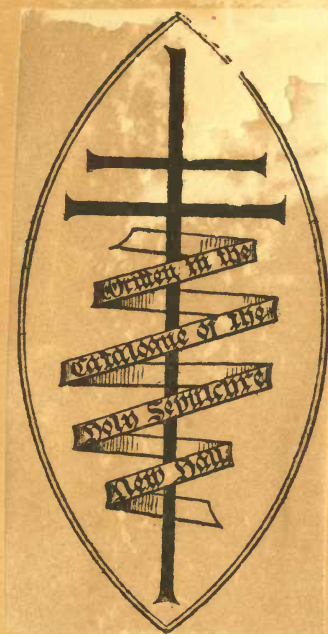
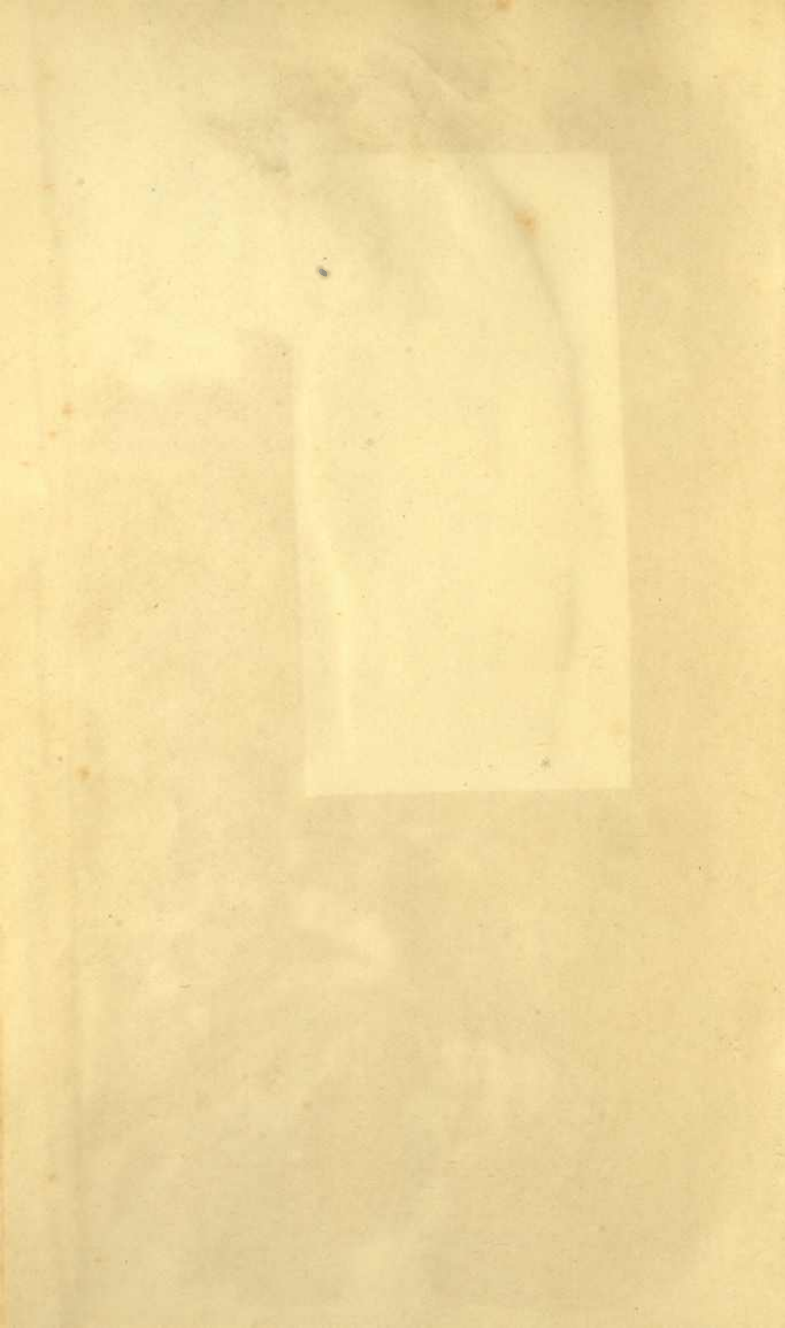




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AN ESSAY  
ON THE  
INTEREST AND CHARACTERISTICS  
OF  
THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS,

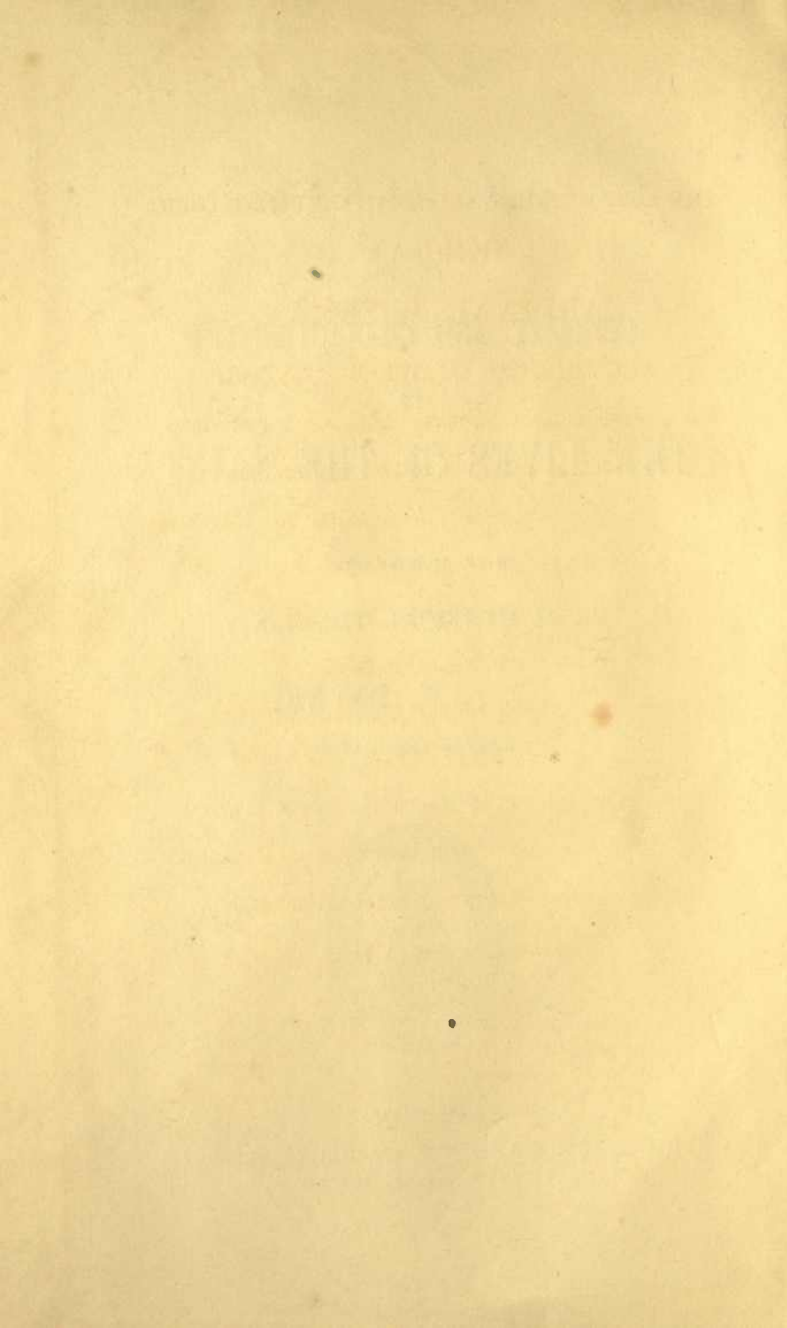
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS  
FROM MYSTICAL THEOLOGY.

BY F. W. FABER,

PRIEST OF THE ORATORY.



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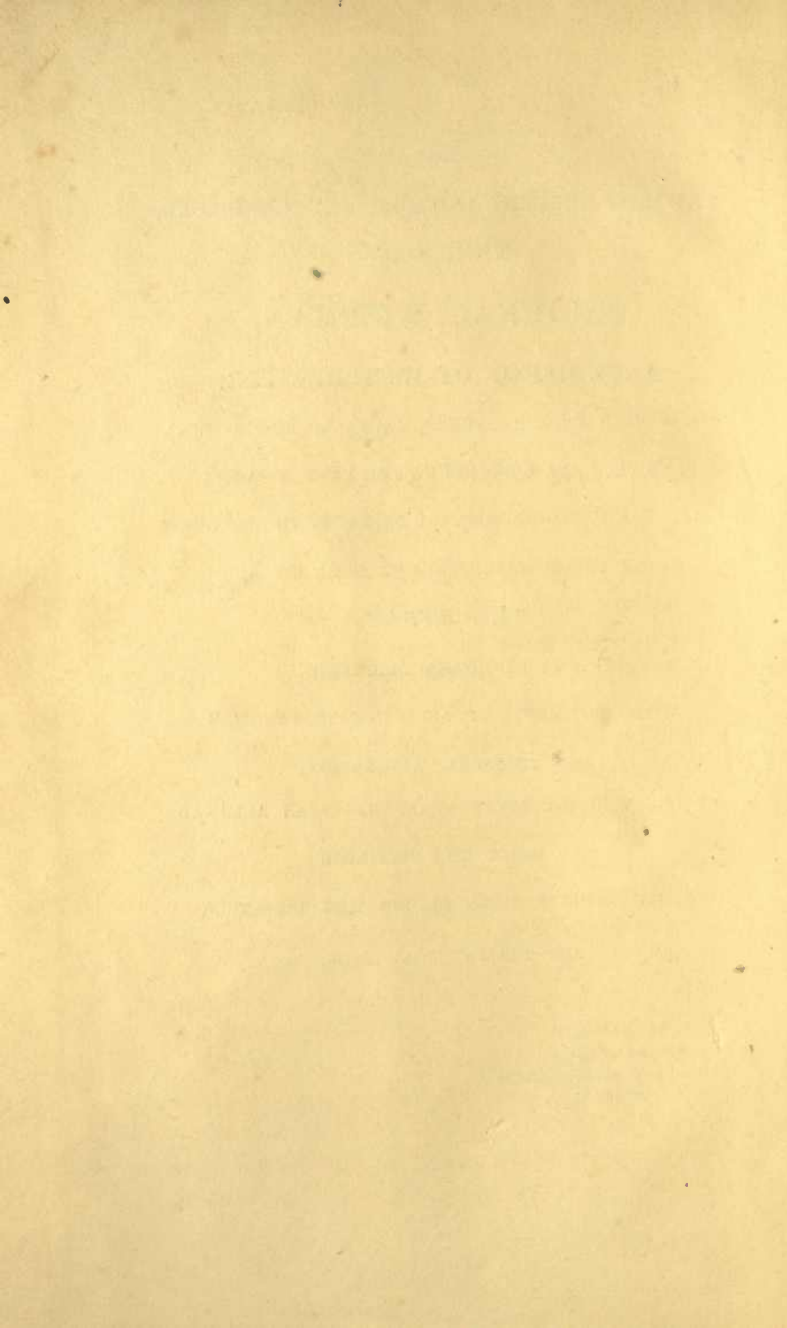


TO  
THE MOST EMINENT AND MOST REVEREND LORD,  
NICHOLAS,  
CARDINAL WISEMAN,  
ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER,  
WHOSE KIND ENCOURAGEMENT, VALUABLE SUGGESTIONS,  
AND PECULIAR DEVOTION TO THE MODERN SAINTS,  
FOSTERED THE BEGINNINGS, AND DEFENDED THE PROGRESS  
OF THE ENGLISH SERIES OF THEIR LIVES,

THIS ESSAY

IS BY PERMISSION DEDICATED,  
WITH SENTIMENTS OF AFFECTIONATE DEVOTION  
AND PERSONAL ADMIRATION,  
BY ONE WHO FOR SEVEN YEARS HAS BEEN ALLOWED  
TO ENJOY THE PRIVILEGE  
OF HIS INTIMATE KINDNESS, HIS WISE DIRECTION,  
AND HIS PATERNAL RULE.

ST. MARY'S,  
SYDENHAM HILL,  
FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION.  
M.DCCC.LIII.





ON  
THE INTEREST AND CHARACTERISTICS  
OF THE  
LIVES OF THE SAINTS.

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THE Lives of the Saints form in Catholic countries a body of literature; this literature is distinguished by certain characteristic features of its own, and exercises a special influence. The number of these lives, the frequency of the new editions, and the testimony of those who are occupied either in the giving of retreats, the preaching of missions, or the spiritual direction of convents, all testify to the influence exercised by these biographies on the spiritual advancement of the faithful. No one who is at all familiar with spiritual books, can have failed to be struck with the number of interesting anecdotes which unite to prove the power of these lives for good, and their connection with the conversion of sinners, as well as the perfection of the chosen servants of God. This is an undeniable fact, and we must deal with it as a fact. Now the lives which exercise this influence in Italy, Spain, and France, are fairly represented by those which have been selected for this series, or rather the volumes

of this series those are very works themselves. It is another fact, therefore, that this series has done a great work already in other countries.

This gives rise to some reflections which it may be worth while to pursue. There are some whom these lives have disappointed, and some whom they do not interest, as well as those whom they may very naturally be expected to anger. It may seem strange that books which are read in Catholic countries with such avidity, and produce such abundant fruits of holy living, should seem dull, tame, and uninteresting to any Catholic reader, and we might be tempted to think the fault lay rather with the reader than with the lives themselves. Yet it may be that persons use what was intended for one object, for a wholly different one for which it was not intended, and this may explain the dulness which they complain of. Let us then see precisely in what these complaints consist. Let us see if we cannot afford to argue the matter in a good-humoured way.

In the Essay on Canonization prefixed to the first volume of the Life of S. Alfonso, a probable objection to the form of these lives was thus anticipated. (p. 48.) "It is this definite and orderly discussion of the theological and cardinal virtues which has impressed itself so completely upon the form and arrangement of modern Italian biographers; that fourfold division into facts, virtues, gifts, and miracles, which so entirely mystifies all chronology, and is mostly so teasing to English readers by its apparently awkward methodism. There can be no doubt but that Bacci's biography of St. Philip Neri would be far more life-like and captivating if it

were arranged in chronological order; the absence of this destroys all the light and shade of a life, and the development of a Saint is in itself, especially when he is a founder, of immense interest. But it may be questioned whether as spiritual reading and a *help to mental prayer*, a life written on the Italian method is not the best of the two." Neither were the words of the last sentence merely said at random, or in self-defence. They have no less an authority than the great Da Ponte, who thus prolongs one of the many digressions which destroy the literary interest of his famous life of F. Balthasar Alvarez (ii. 195): "It is true that in prolonging this digression I wander very far from my subject; but I think that *in these sort of works* one must look less to the method of writing than to the edification of the readers."

Now to speak of ourselves for a few moments; the object for which this series was started was not to help on the cause of Catholic literature; it was not merely to instruct or amuse; neither was it chiefly to draw men into the True Fold by the exhibition of the beauty of holiness; it was to furnish spiritual reading, in the technical sense of that term. It was to help on the practice of asceticism, and to assist those who should be lured by God's grace from precepts to counsels, from the world to the religious life, from ordinary attainments to the perfection which resides in generosity and interior mortification. It was for the refectory of the college and the convent, or for the secret spiritual exercises of the cell, or for the free-time of the Retreat, or for the bedrooms of those who live in the world with-

out loving it. It had no object patent and palpable to the world. It was to effect no great work, as great things are counted, nor to have to do with any particular movement, or set afloat any new spirit, or represent the genius of any peculiar school; it was to be a common-place contribution to the interior life, and it boasts of no more of a literary character than a new version of Thomas à Kempis, or a fresh arrangement of *Piety Exemplified*, or any one of those sober practical treatises which the modest diligence of the Ursulines of Black Rock may give to the Catholic public.

It is important to keep in mind the professed and almost exclusive object of the work, so as to see what objections to it are fair, and what are unreasonable. In truth, it has done more work, and filled a wider field, than was expected, though, as was hinted in the Prospectus, this has not taken us altogether by surprise; and it has, therefore, been noticed more than it deserved, and certainly more than it desired. This may have been good for its practical influence, but it has been unfortunate for its literary defects.

The original prospectus put forth three objects; the first and main one was spiritual reading, against "earthly principles and low views of grace;" the second was to make enquirers more "really in earnest about their souls;" the third was to spread "the honour and love" of the Madonna. Here is nothing grand, bold, or captivating; no literary view or intellectual design, but as humble and quiet a piece of work as a set of spiritual books



could chalk out for themselves. Bearing this in mind, let us now see whether the expectations the series has disappointed are not in reality hopes which it never held out, and prospects which it never wished to realize.

Five years ago it was considered necessary to put forward an Essay in defence of this series of lives, and while it was our duty to meet objections at that day of a different nature from those which are being urged now, we were led in explaining the *idea* of the series, as put forward in the original prospectus, to make some incidental observations, which bear so clearly on the present objections, that they would seem written for them. Thus (p. 80,) mention is made of the choice of translation, in spite of the "inevitable forfeit of pure style and spirited narrative." Again, (p. 82,) it is said: "The lives drawn up for or from the processes, were always to be preferred, although often with less literary attractiveness about them than lives written with more freedom. The object of the series is rather spiritual than literary, and as all masters of the spiritual life tell us that the biographies of the Saints should be read slowly, pausatim, and a little at a time, the style of the processes seemed in some degree more suitable." Again, in the same page, "Notes were to be avoided as much as possible, as so many vents of private opinion, and involving more or less the office of critic or censor." These quotations are not made as if to prove that the original idea was a good one, but to show what our friends perhaps overlook, that there *was* an idea to start with, and that it has at least been kept to with consistency.

And this is something, that we have kept to our idea.

It is clear there are different points of view from which we may look at the Saints, and one would be this. A Saint is raised up by God to do a definite work, very often it is a work of great magnitude and of historical importance, like the connection between S. Charles Borromeo and the Council of Trent, or S. Ignatius and Protestantism, or S. Vincent of Paul and the state of the French clergy. Or a Saint has to do with some particular spirit getting the mastery in the Church at a given time, as S. Alfonso with his moral theology, or S. Philip with his popular services and imitation of the ways of the primitive Christians. Or there is a suitability between the foundation of a religious order, and the needs of the Church at that particular epoch, as in the case of S. Cajetan and the mixed life of which he showed the pattern to the Church. Or the servant of God is made a Saint by the abuses he has had to encounter, as the canonized kings of Bohemia and Hungary, or S. Pius V., the most rigorous of Pontiffs. All these things are of course deeply interesting, yet they can hardly be said to form spiritual reading; they belong rather to history, or to ordinary biography. They are not those fruits of holiness for which God has directed the Church to canonize the Saints, but rather the circumstances which they found favourable, or the difficulties which God blessed, to the exercise of virtue. They are deeply edifying and instructive, and the life of the Saint would not be a true one in which they were omitted, but they are the less

spiritual and the more historical part. It is a matter of indifference as to canonization, whether the circumstances which have called out the heroic exercise of patience and fortitude be the public calamities of the Church, as in the case of S. Athanasius, or of the state, as in the case of S. Louis, or whether it be the secret illtreatment of monastic superiors, as with S. John of the Cross, or a painful calumny believed by authorities at Rome, as with S. Joseph of Calasanctius, or the harshness of worldly parents, hardly known beyond the next street, as with S. Catherine of Siena. Canonization is not concerned with the historical interest or importance of the facts, but with given results of heroism, no matter under what pressure, or from what occasions.

This is the historical view of the Saints. Then there is the psychological view. A Saint exhibits a virtue in a particular way, as the hot-spirited Moses became the meekest of men, or he stereotypes a mental character on a whole order for generations, as S. Ignatius and S. Philip, or his prudence and wisdom are very peculiar and special, and thus interesting as a study as well as edifying as a lesson, as with the patriarch S. Francis, and later on S. Cajetan and S. Charles. Or, again, the peculiar difference of similar sweetness is interesting, as, for instance, the sweetness of S. Philip, S. Francis of Sales, and S. Vincent of Paul. Besides this, the private character of Saints who are historical personages, and play an important part before the world, is in itself interesting for this very reason, as the private life and devotional practices of S. Thomas of Canterbury, or S. Pius V. So the effects

of suffering, which have a great deal to do with the spiritual interest of the lives of the Saints, have likewise a deep psychological interest, as with S. Alfonso and S. Camillus. So also have the spiritualized reappearances of old professions in the converted lives of holy men, as the military traditions of S. Ignatius. Or natural temper comes out as when S. Philip by faith converts a Jew in S. John Lateran, while by faith S. Camillus turns a Jew somewhat roughly out of the diligence. So childishness may perhaps mingle with the childlikeness of the young contemplative Saints, or with the holy rudeness of the youthful martyrs to the tyrants, as if nature without fault would make a background the better to bring out the loveliness of grace, though we should shrink from judging so of any particular instance. So natural character tinges visions, gives a fashion to raptures, puts its own accent into supernatural voices, works miracles its own way, and even qualifies revelations. But in respect of canonization these are only accidental characteristics of the Saints, and though full of spiritual teaching, they are not the reasons for which the Church honours them upon her altars.

Even in the marvellous and more supernatural portions of hagiology, there is much which is psychologically interesting, without any reference either to mystical theology or to spiritual edification. The way in which nature mingles with the most uncommon gifts of God, and debases their operation, opens out to the philosopher a wide field for speculation, when he has once admitted the evidence of the facts as too clear and overwhelming to be gainsaid, without overturning all the laws and conditions of histo-



rical proof. Persons who take an interest in mesmerism and electro-biology are known to study these lives of the Saints, and to read them with great avidity, and it is quite conceivable that they would wish them to be written in a way which would bring out more distinctly this kind of interest. An instance of this may be found in the difference laid down by theologians between the spirit of prophecy and the prophetic instinct. "Sometimes," says St. Gregory the Great, "*the prophets while they are consulted, by reason of their frequent prophesying, speak in their own spirit, thinking that they are speaking in the spirit of prophecy. But in order to prevent delusion the Holy Ghost quickly corrects them, and they hear from Him what is true, and blame themselves who have spoken falsely.*" This may be exemplified in what passed between David and Nathan in the second book of Kings. David said to Nathan the Prophet, "Dost thou see that I dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God is lodged within skins?" And Nathan said to the king :—"Go, do all that is in thy heart; because the Lord is with thee." But it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying :—"Go and say to my servant David;" and then follows the prohibition of building the temple, which is to be reserved for David's son and successor. According to St. Thomas, the spirit of prophecy, properly so-called, brings with it such complete certainty, that the prophet is assured that he cannot be deceived; whereas, the prophetic instinct is a blind feeling, which has no such clearness, and may often come, as is hinted by St Gre-

gory, in the words just quoted, from the mental results of a habit of prophesying.

There was a certain devout widow at Tivoli, in the seventeenth century, named Arsilia Altissimi, and her spiritual director was F. Niccolo Baldelli, of Cortona, a Jesuit. After her death he wrote an account of her graces, which was not published, but the MS. was lent to Cardinal Lambertini, when he was composing his great work on canonization, and he quotes many striking passages from it. F. Baldelli notices particularly the difference between the spirit of prophecy and the prophetic instinct. He says :—"Perhaps it is thus, that it has sometimes happened that different persons have published contradictory revelations, as, for example, that the Blessed Virgin was, and was not, conceived without original sin; one only of these had received a true revelation, the other believed he had it, but in truth had spoken only of his own spirit, and not by inspiration of God. In the same way, when the light of prophesy is imperfect, the prophet may be moved to conceive internally, and to speak, or do something which God wills to be a symbol or sign of future things, without his understanding the true meaning of the matter, which he conceives, speaks, or does, as was the case with Caiphas, of whom St. John says, 'that being the high-priest of that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation.' And this prophetic light was in him only an instinct to speak materially these words :—"It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' And this, as St. John says, 'he spoke not of himself,' and as St.

Thomas teaches, he did not even understand what he was saying, neither did he at all pretend to prophesy, as St. Augustine observes.”

There is a very famous instance of this in the failure of St. Bernard's Crusade, on which Benedict XIV., comments as follows. The passage is altogether too interesting to be abridged.

“S. Thomas having said that it is not perfect prophecy, but the prophetic instinct, when a man is moved by God, and knows not that it is God who moves him, makes this golden observation : There is no contradiction in this that the revelation should be true and from God, and the human explanation of it false, for man may interpret it otherwise than God understands it. Lewis the Younger, king of France, made known to the princes of the realm his desire of proceeding to the Holy Land, and sought their consent : they determined to refer the matter to S. Bernard, the abbot. The abbot was sent for, and he thought that a matter of such moment should be referred to the decision of the Pontiff. The Pope, Eugenius, greatly praised and approved of it, and gave him authority to preach and rouse the minds of all, for he was looked upon as an apostle or prophet by all the people of France and Germany. Wherefore, not only in the empire, but in the neighbouring kingdoms, in Western France, England, and Hungary, people and nations were stirred up to assume the cross, and enrol themselves in that sacred army, as Otho tells us at length. The expedition, which was confirmed by signs and miracles, came to a disastrous end, and the Christian soldiers perished, defeated by the infidels, by the just judg-

ment of God, and S. Bernard, whom before all men honoured exceedingly, was condemned as an impostor and a false prophet. He thus writes on the subject : ‘ If one of two things must take place, then I prefer that men should murmur against us, and not against God. It is good for me that He is pleased to use me as a shield. I am ready to receive all the biting reproaches of my accusers. We said peace, and there was no peace ; we promised good things, but behold confusion.’ He then says in his own defence : ‘ As if we had acted with rashness or levity in the matter ! We went forward openly in it, not as if it were a doubtful matter, at thy bidding, (namely, Eugenius the Pope,) or rather at the bidding of God through thee.’ Then stating the reproaches of the people ; ‘ Whence can we know that the word has gone forth from our Lord ; what miracles dost thou do that we may believe thee ?’ He answers as follows, addressing Eugenius : ‘ It is not for me to reply to this, spare me. Answer thou for me, and for thyself according to what thou hast seen and heard.’ In these words he modestly admits that he had wrought miracles in confirmation of his preaching. No question could, or can be raised as to the truth of the revelation and prophecy, but the most high and unchangeable truth of God was not understood by man ; the counsel of men was one thing, that of God another ; men had proposed to themselves as their object the subjugation of Jerusalem, for their thoughts are of the earth, glory, and wealth ; and God, the eternal salvation of those who, in that expedition, had died for the faith and the Church. John, the venerable



abbot of Casamare, made the matter known to S. Bernard in a letter, in which he writes thus: 'I have been informed, my most dear brother, that thou art greatly grieved at this affair—I speak of the expedition to Jerusalem—that it has not prospered according to thy wish, and that the Church and glory of God have not increased as thou desiredst.' Then saying that the matter succeeded not according to the wishes of men, but the counsel of God, he thus proceeds: 'But do not doubt what I am going to say; I make it known as to my spiritual father in confession. The patrons of this place of ours, the Blessed John and Paul, have frequently visited us, and I have questioned them on this subject; they replied and said, that a multitude of angels who had fallen have been restored in the persons of those who fell there.' Cardinal Bona applies this fact of S. Bernard to confirm the subject of which we are now treating. Gravina, in discussing how false visions and revelations may be discerned from the true, vindicates the prediction or prophecy of S. Vincent Ferrer, concerning the end of the world and the coming of antichrist. S. Antoninus, too, may be consulted on the subject of that prophecy."—vol. iii. pp. 201—4.

Precisely the same phenomenon which we have observed in prophecy is equally to be discerned in the matter of visions and of private revelations, which last partake of the nature of prophecy. Theologians teach that holy persons may see and hear in visions and divine locutions, according to the predispositions of their intellect and will. Their spiritual director is of a particular school of the-

ology, or they themselves belong to a religious order which has pet opinions, or they are attached to certain pious and permitted opinions and practices, which are not defined or commanded by the Church; or they have fixed ideas in their imagination, or vivid pictures of a favourite mystery, which pictures through frequent prayer have become habitual with them; and all these things tell upon their visions and revelations. Thus Eusebius Amort thinks that if revelations are very theological, they ought to be suspected. No one (we do not mean by this to anticipate the judgment of the Church, yet pending, but) no one can read the revelations of Sister Mary of Agreda, without seeing how full they are of the technicalities and minute subtleties of the Scotist theology. S. Bridget says that our Lord had a garment on when he was scourged. Suarez following several of the ancient fathers, writes against this revelation; and Hurtado simply observes that S. Bridget no doubt said so because she knew that criminals who were to be crucified had usually one garment left on them. Lancisius, speaking of the supposed revelation of S. Catherine of Sienna, against the Immaculate Conception, says that it did not come from the Spirit of God, but from her own understanding, as one of the spiritual children of the Dominicans, from whom she had learned it. And he adds: "We must know that when pious persons, abstracted from the senses, speak, they frequently speak of their own understanding, and are sometimes deceived. This is certain, and persons experienced in these things know it, and it is clear from authentic ecclesiastical histories, and I could name

some holy women, canonised by the Apostolic See, whose sayings and writings in rapture, and derived from raptures, are filled with errors, and therefore not allowed to be published." It is not out of place to remark on this that there is really no proof of S. Catherine having ever put forth such a revelation. S. Antoninus mentions that such an one was attributed to her ; but it does not exist in the collection of her revelations made by her confessor, the Blessed Raymond of Capua : and Cardinal Gotti and Martin del Rio pronounce it to be apocryphal, and to have crept in in later times, probably to serve a controversial end.

So far, therefore, as literary and intellectual interest is concerned, it may at once be granted that lives of the Saints written from an historical or a psychological point of view, are far more captivating and will influence controversially far more readers, and so will be more obviously telling, than lives written in the style of those which compose this series. Moreover, it would be a very important thing that they should be so written. Neither would translation, except in a very few cases, be the successful mode of bringing them before the public. They must be written by a native of the country for which they are intended, shaped for the taste of that country, directed against its prejudices, or moulded to them, abridged in one part, amplified in another, and interspersed with reflections or conclusions suited to the genius of the national mind. Simply as literature, the present series of lives could not stand by the side of them. If men want to pass away a few hours

in reading less grave than history, and less light than fiction, or if they want to improve their minds, and get edification at the same time, or if they desire to catch the spirit of a particular epoch of the Church or a special religious order, or, which is commonest of all, to spend time on a book which shall lead them on and entertain them like the life of Wellington and Nelson, and yet let them feel or fancy that their interest has all the while been in religion—then such literary lives of the Saints would be just the books for them. The external charities of our dear S. Vincent of Paul, would be extremely and profitably interesting to many a reader, who would find a minute description of his method of prayer insufferably prosy and dull. The dashing boldness of S. Ignatius would fix attention, where the secrets of his spiritual life would repel it. The acute government of the Society of Jesus by the Venerable Vincent Caraffa, would engage readers, to whom his curious and marvellous practice of the presence of God would seem so much puerility and trash, or, at best, matter for confession, but unworthy as material for biography. For the practice of the Presence of God was his special gift, in which he seemed to surpass S. Peter of Alcantara, of whom it is said, in the Report of the Cause of his Canonization, that his love “is inferred from the way in which he perseveringly kept his mind intent upon God, so that he scarcely ever departed from a sense of His Presence, from divine meditation and prayer, like ardent lovers, who day and night think faithfully and intently of the beloved object. This is moreover confirmed by the efficacious purpose and

continual care he maintained of himself, and his actions and thoughts, so as not to offend God, whom he loved so much ; of which amongst other proofs he gave this, that for three consecutive years he always walked with his eyes shut, that he might not behold anything to occasion his offending God, or to distract his sense of God's presence." Furthermore, lives written on this plan would be very effective as weapons of controversy. They would allay irritation, subdue prejudice, invite attention to Catholic doctrine, and settle satisfactorily many of the preliminaries of conversion ; and he would do a great work for the Catholic body in this country, who would embark in such an undertaking.

But it may be objected: "Do you mean to say, then, that the lives of the Saints would be less spiritual if they were more interesting? Does their being interesting destroy their spirituality?" Certainly not. But they would be less spiritual if more interest of a foreign kind, whether historical or psychological, were introduced into them. What would make them more interesting to you perhaps would make them less spiritual, because their spiritual character is what interests you least. To you the life of the Saint is the pill which you can only swallow when it is disguised with the life of the great man. The secret training through which the Holy Spirit led his soul is only tolerable so far as it is intellectually connected with his exterior actions; and the fine shades of difference in the exercise of virtues, as between the faith of S. Jane Frances de Chantal, and the faith of S. Camillus of Lellis, is not discernible by you, because it is not a matter



which you happen to be interested in. But then another man may reasonably say, Well! you have your taste, and I have mine. To me it is a matter of little moment how F. Caraffa governed the Jesuits, but every word dropped ever so casually about his practice of the Presence of God, interests me immensely. I get a little tired with all the orders, confraternities, asylums, associations, schools, orphanages, and missions of the great apostle of Paris; but what there was in his exterior life, which without miracles could make him so great a saint, and keep him recollected when he was always so busy,—this is what interests, arrests, fascinates me. St. Ignatius, starting from Paris like a knight-errant, in search of spiritual adventures, is tame to me, compared with St. Ignatius preparing his points for meditation over-night, years after God had given him the gift of infused contemplation. The fact is, no one is to blame; neither you nor the lives of the saints. You have simply taken them for something they do not profess to be; it is a body of literature with which you happen to be only partially, very partially in sympathy. If you want to read the Life of a saint and can get none but these, you must read the chronological part, and skip the virtues. All I complain of is, that you are a little unreasonable: you take up a Blue Book at your spare moments, and then wonder it does not lead you on like Guy Mannering. Yet if you were on a committee of the House, or had got some hobby about education, or the prevention of crime, or the working of secondary punishments, the Blue Book would become a luxury, and Guy Mannering an

impertinence. If you read these lives of the saints with any other view than to BECOME THEREBY MORE CLOSELY UNITED WITH GOD, I should have thought they were of all books the most uninteresting.

Without stopping to enquire whether the objector would be content with this answer, it is plain that to dispose of the objection satisfactorily, we must come to a clear understanding about the nature of spiritual reading. And first, what spiritual reading is not. It is not the mere reading of books about God and religion, because they interest us, and at our own discretion, and with no particular reference to our spiritual condition at the time. Religious reading is not what is technically meant by spiritual reading. Spiritual reading, then, is a devotional exercise, to be performed at a fixed hour and for a determined time; it has to be done in a particular way, for which the saints have laid down rules, as that it should be a little at a time, read pausingly, interspersed with ejaculations, and, which is observable, some have recommended, first that it should not be in a book which attaches the intellect; and secondly, that a book should not be read quite through, in order to lose the intellectual interest which completeness might give. This last was the rule of F. Consolini, the friend of S. Philip, and the first novice-master of the Oratory. It is to stand in the same relation to our daily mental prayer that the can of oil stands in to the lamp; it is as much as possible to bear on the subject of our particular examen of conscience at the time, the vice we are trying to eradicate, or the virtue we are endeavouring to naturalize in ourselves; it should run, there-

fore, rather in subjects, and portions of books, than in authors and whole works: and, for the most part, it should be under the guidance of a spiritual director, and limited by his choice. It is medicine, and so we must not quack ourselves, and take it out of our own heads.

Thus, saints have been formed by the imitation of Kempis; S. Francis of Sales was formed, if we may use such a word, on the *Spiritual Combat* of Scupoli; the Theatine spirit runs all through him; it is the spirit of the Congregations of the Church as distinguished from her Orders. Now, without foolishly comparing the one book with the other, it is plain the spirit of the two is very different, and we may give one to one person, the other to another, or both to the same persons at different times. Again, there are few persons to whom that inestimable treasure of the Church, Rodriguez's *Christian Perfection*, is not suitable; and few to whom Surin is suitable, or S. John of the Cross, or B. Henry Suso; and fewer still who could safely read Guillerè, or Tauler, or Cassian, or Baker's *Sancta Sophia*, or even some parts of Gerson: and to fix this or that particular book for this or that person, implies neither condemnation nor comparison of the works themselves. Religious communities, too, have their own ways. The beautiful spirit of the Visitation grows almost bitter and its superiors almost irritable at extraordinary ways of the spiritual life. S. Jane Frances, quite one of the most wonderful saints, said Rodriguez and Da Ponte were enough for her. So entirely is spiritual reading a daily exercise, having strict reference to our

spiritual condition and warfare at the time. It is part of a system, part of a day, and goes along with the meditation, the examen, the mortification, the intention of communion, and the ejaculation. And it is for spiritual reading, in this sense, that these Lives of the Saints are intended. Thus, to quote from Rodriguez, who in his treatise on prayer gives a separate chapter to spiritual reading, it was this exercise which S. Benedict ordered in his Rule; and of such importance did he account it, that he appointed two monks to go round the monastery at the fixed hour to see that everybody was "making" his spiritual reading; and one of the Rules of S. Ignatius is as follows: "The religious should twice a-day employ therein the time allotted for examen of conscience, for meditation, and *spiritual reading*, and with all possible care and diligence apply themselves thereunto in the Lord. And the superior, or spiritual prefect, is to take care that each one daily employs therein the time allotted for these exercises." And Rodriguez adds: "Hugo of S. Victor says that a servant of God was counselled by a revelation, to discontinue the reading of all sorts of intricate, or hard matters, and apply himself to read the lives of saints, and other books of the like nature; and that, by this means, he made very great progress in piety."

Mental prayer is worth very little, if it does not lead at once to mortification of the passions, and the acquisition of solid virtues. Yet it is hard to keep to this. The understanding is ready to range about as proud as a peacock and as pert as a magpie, in the limits of the subject to which we confine it; and

the imagination can easily run away with our good resolutions, and make poems of the composition of place. But the will is slow to be set on fire, as if it were very asbest ; and self-knowledge drains into us with an effort, and painfully, drop by drop. Hence the importance of succouring our prayer by the particular examen of conscience, and also by the fixed subject of our spiritual reading. Trying to be good is dry work, in the long run, when the effervescence of sensible fervour has done singing and sparkling. Its interest is simply from its importance, and only they who try can tell what a rigid, unamiable task-master is perseverance ; it makes life like a perpetual waiting all day to go out and watching for the dismal rain to have done, when in fact the day is not going to clear up at all. This is trying to be simply good ; to get up into the regions of God's merciful consolations, we must put more heart into our efforts, and aim a little higher.

When we think of imitating the Saints, and for an instant a flash of light passes before us and we dare to deem it possible, it is not the recollection of their miracles, or their ecstasies, or strange gifts, which after the momentary hope makes our hearts die within us. It is the staid perseverance, the lifelong effort, the continuous strain which cast us down and makes us feel how far off from our attainments is heroic virtue. F. Martin de Esparza, who wrote on the virtues, was also one of those whose suffrages on the cause of the Venerable Cardinal Bellarmine, were printed, and in it he speaks as follows : "It is not in holy confessors, as in martyrs, that heroicity of virtue is discovered in some one



or other exterior work, very arduous, difficult, and admirable, because such a particular act can seldom fall in the way of holy confessors, or of many of them, to do ; and where it has fallen in their way, and they have done such things, they are not for that reason especially esteemed and reputed heroes of holiness, but because, before and after it, but particularly up to the time of their death, they have persevered in a continuous, uninterrupted course of innocency of life, doing everything according to the evangelical precepts and counsels, with those circumstances in each action which tend to the summit of perfection, as to their substance and manner, with a firm and intense contempt of all earthly things, and a corresponding adhesion to God and to things divine. Now this way of life, pursued uniformly and invariably for a long time, far surpasses the condition of human nature left to itself. That is truly invariable and inconstant for many reasons, but above all, because of the continual assaults of passions, conflicting at intervals with each other, yet always in league to seduce unto pleasure, and at last drawing men away from all virtue, much more from the highest degree of virtue. *Whereas that sublime and long unvaried rule of action doth so far transcend the condition of man's nature, that it approaches closely to the essentially changeless holiness of the Divine Nature, and therefore of itself suffices for evangelical heroicity, because it of itself constitutes a man perfect after the manner that our Father in heaven is perfect.* But in Bellarmine, so remarkably stainless was his course in such a life, and so entirely perfect in each thing his mode of action, almost from

mere infancy to his seventy-ninth year inclusive, the last of his life, that throughout that long time no one was able to discern in him any sin, even venial, with perfect deliberation, nor yet any trace of imperfection respecting the evangelical counsels or the rules of religion. There is no occasion to produce any single witness to prove this, because our whole summary is full of such panegyrics on oath, and others, not indeed on oath, but well worthy of belief, and certainly convincing, on account of the eminent qualities of the deponents. What can be said to the fact that in the general confession of his whole life, made upon his deathbed, the confessor could scarcely find sufficient matter for a valid absolution? This long course of action, therefore, and way of life, unstained, perfect, and exemplary in every condition, time, and place, does of itself prove conclusively the heroicity of all the virtues of Cardinal Bellarmine."

Yet, as if this unearthly perseverance were not enough to humble us to the dust, theologians must needs add to it the further quality of perseverance with facility and delight. Benedict XIV. speaks as follows: "We must also observe, that excellence in the virtues cannot be said to be proved by acts, *however manifold and heroic*, unless such acts were elicited *promptly, easily, and with delight*, as Scacchus shows at length, as follows: 'An ease and readiness in the power of producing virtuous acts is the mark and sign of a habit already acquired. Further, pleasure in producing the act is the mark of a habit already acquired, and intense in degree. Lastly, if with this pleasure there be united a sweetness felt

by any one in eliciting any act of virtue with a view to some supernatural end, prompted by charity, such sweetness and delight is a mark and sign of heroicity, which doth naturally cause a certain readiness and delight, together with sweetness, in the faculties producing special acts." In fine, to answer in the affirmative to a question as to the existence of heroic virtues, it is necessary that the hero should always have been the same, that is, that he should not have strayed from the path of virtue, as Cardinal de Aguirre teaches. 'But in whatever degree,' says he, 'heroic virtue is possessed, it not only does not permit any vice, or deliberate bad actions of any kind, but not even the omission of any action, most admirable and perfect, according to the several circumstances of person, time, and place, wherein it ought to be exercised. Wherefore it never allows of anything low, anything mean, or any even pardonable imperfection of manners, on full deliberation, but at all times and places retains that sublimity of soul, tending with all its might to the highest goodness, and to the following of God; although herein, as we have said, there are degrees, the highest, the middle, and the lowest, according to the highest, middle, and lowest intensity, more and more without any certain limit.' "

Now see how this bears upon the Italian method of writing the lives of the saints upon the processes for canonization. The spiritual reading of persons is to be directed to the acquisition of confidence in God, or of humility; and as example is so much more attractive than precept, they are referred to the lives of the saints. They have not to hunt about

for stray anecdotes, which they may or may not remember to have found scattered through the lives, a troublesome as well as distracting occupation. But they can see how confidence in God was practised by St. Jane Frances de Chantal, and then by St. Ignatius, and then by some contemplative nun in her interior trials, and then by some bishop with a set of disorderly clergy, or a missionary in the weariness of travel and imprisonment, or a novice under the little daily mortifications of community life; and the same with humility, and the other virtues. They can turn to it all, as easily as to an article in an encyclopædia, and see the various guidance of the Holy Ghost exemplified in the lively, real revelations of the heroism of the saints. The same method is equally convenient for the preacher with his sermons, or the novice-master with his conferences. It forms for all a sort of summary of spiritual theology, much more attractive than the mere rules of a spiritual treatise, and kindling in us all the while a more personal interest in those who have power in heaven, as well as a deeper veneration for them, and a more solid devotion to them.

How deeply does the practice of the invocation of saints enter into the spiritual life of the saints themselves, and how completely does the same practice lie almost unused upon the surface of the devout life of ordinary Catholics! It is astonishing how closely the invocation of the saints goes along with an interior spirit; though on first thought it would not have seemed likely. Indeed, this is one of many illustrations which might be brought forward, to show how much of the spirit of

holiness is concentrated with an especial power and vivid force, in what seem the accidental parts, or ornamental practices of the Catholic system, in those things which the world more particularly means when it uses the word "popery." Surely to us the anecdotes in the lives of the saints are not simply interesting, or instructive, or edifying; they are far more; they are voices to us from spirits who love us, and can aid us, and with whom we can enter into the closest relations of prayer, and who can do more for us in gaining the very virtue we are aiming at, than we can do for ourselves, because they can obtain for us greater grace. It was the very jealousy of this matter which filled the Spanish Jesuits with such suspicion of Father Alvarez's prayer of quiet. One of the Father Provincial's objections was, "It leads men to forget the Saints and vocal prayers." How many a man's daily communion with his angel, or his patron saint, or even the founder of his order, is nothing more than an ejaculated *Ora pro me*. How little does it enter with us, as it did with the Saints, into the substance and solidity of their devotion! And why? Because it is not so much that the Saints excelled us in love, as that they towered above us in their gift of faith.

The interest then which those who are fond of the lives of the Saints take in them is derived from two sources. One is the practical bearing of these biographies, as spiritual reading upon men's daily lives, their prayers, mortifications, self-knowledge, and devotional practises. Everything which forms an integral part of their self-discipline and their in-



tercourse with God, must of necessity be interesting to them just in proportion to their earnestness. How can that fail to interest them which has its place in each day's struggle, which is continually finding an echo in the wants and experiences of the inmost heart and conscience, or coming like a ray of light into dark places, or drawing us closer to our celestial guides and patrons? How can that be dull which is an earnest or a memorial of temptation resisted, of duty done, or of sin forgiven? How can those formal chapters which treasure up accumulated examples of one particular virtue seem tiresome, when the remembrance of them is so often, like another guardian angel, staying faithfully by the side of conscience all the day long, making men sweet-mannered, and gentle-worded, and bright-faced, when they would otherwise have been quick, or rude, or bitter, or sullen, while the anecdotes speak to us, like so many voices, one cheering on the other, and many doing what one would perhaps have failed to do. Ah! holiness is a life-long occupation. Each day has its work; each duty its temptation; each struggle its place in reference to the chain of graces compassionately intended for it. We cannot rest on our oars, and then resume our toil as before; the stream we are rowing against runs far too rapid for that. These lives of the Saints, therefore, are interesting in the same sense as meditation is interesting, or examination of conscience interesting, or preparation for confession interesting. Not that this is their sole interest; but it is their chief interest and their own peculiar kind of interest: a sober, solemn, practical, and constant interest, which wears well, and has to

do with the presence of God and the humiliation of ourselves; and the world has after all nothing worth talking about but these two things.

Yet it does not at all follow that, because spiritual reading is of so much importance, therefore everyone must have lives of the Saints for spiritual reading. There must be elbow-room for the taste of the individual in spiritual, as well as in other matters, perhaps even more than in other matters; and it is very far from our wish to convey the idea that those who find the lives of the Saints uninteresting are on that account wanting in holiness and the love of God. We are defending ourselves, not attacking others. There is abundance of spiritual reading besides the biographies of saints, though these last enjoy, beyond all other kinds, the advantage of the example and authority of the saints themselves. Only, men should not complain of the lives, because their taste is not satisfied in them, especially when they come to see that it is their own mistake to have looked for what they want in the wrong place. And after all, are they not losers by this taste of theirs? just as a man is a loser who has no eye for scenery, or no ear for music, or no appreciation for some one of the fine arts? they have a source of pleasure and of profit less than we; we have an instinct and a sense more than they. It may be that it only accidentally helps to make us better; but that is a great thing of itself, and then there is the enjoyment of our additional sense beside.

It is of importance to get this view well into our minds. Men, especially when they have a favourite pursuit, are apt to attribute a certain moral ex-

cellence to the taste for it and the enjoyment in it. Yet this is very narrow-minded; for it is a bad argument which would maintain that a particular medicine must be good for every one, because it has been good for us. God in the abundance of His mercy lets all things do us good; and so when we interest ourselves in some special thing for His sake, He blesses it to be a means of grace to our souls. He condescends to do our will and to go our way, so long as it be His glory in which we are allowed to interest ourselves. We shall forfeit this blessing, if we set ourselves up as a rule, or sit in judgment on others, who may make less demonstration for God, and yet be far more generously and unreservedly His in heart. There can be no question that the "turn" for hagiology, and those provinces of ascetical and mystical theology which belong to it, is a peculiar taste, or sympathy; and one alas! which is easily separable from quiet, firm mortification of ourselves, from real enlightened austerity of life, or painstaking struggle for solid and unostentatious virtue; just as a taste for dogmatic theology is no evidence of an earnest desire to save our souls. How many faults should we escape if we did not make little Catholic churches of ourselves, to give the rule to others! How much more of honest joy and graceful pleasure should we have in the good which others do, how much more helpful sympathy in their works and enterprises, how much more of hopeful interest and of sanguine diligence and of easily satisfied contentment in all the little ventures men are making round us for the glory of God and the saving of dear souls,—if only we re-

membered that all works are good which we do not know to be spoiled by self-love, and we only know this of our own, and if, moreover, we persuaded our good angel ever to be whispering to us that God's "commandments are exceedingly broad," and that we cannot "run the way of those commandments" until He "enlarge our hearts."

But although this practical interest is the chief one which many take in the Lives of the Saints, there is another which if less important, is still more various and fertile, and arises from many sources. When a man has given himself up to the service of God, and is penetrated with that contempt of the world and its pursuits, which must come at last from assiduous meditation on eternal truths, then the character of God, the occupations of the next world, the interest of souls, the secrets of the spiritual life, the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the fathoming of His mysteries, become the absorbing passion of his soul: though he may exhibit that passion in a diversity of ways. Just as a man in the world with an engrossing pursuit lays hold of everything which illustrates or tells upon his favourite occupation with a vivacity which astonishes others, as he finds meanings in things, or puts interpretations upon them which one not possessed with the same ruling idea would never dream of, so is it with the spiritual man. He finds much in the Lives of the Saints, which he perceives at once is, in his case, admirable rather than imitable; but it is not on that account without deep interest to him, nor yet without practical interest to him, as it leads him to a more fervent love of God, and to more

frequent and heartfelt adoration of His unspeakable compassions. Lives which are to others a mere glare of visions, ecstasies and revelations are to him full of wisdom and of teaching; they join themselves on to other things; they confirm or bring out divine truths; and they seem to make us better acquainted with God, our dear Lord, and our future companions in bliss; and they either create or deepen a devout and joyful wonder, full of the savour of Divine Wisdom, and of that spirit of understanding, which is a gift of the Holy Ghost, the joy of contemplation, and a foretaste of the life of the angelic spirits.

Nay, even this feeling of wonder caused by these things in the Lives of the Saints, is akin to a high gift. If God so wills, it may soon pass on to that admiration which suspends the soul in contemplation. St. Augustine and the mystics who follow him, make this wonder to be of the essence of contemplation, and all the schools admit that it is a property of it. "The spirit of man," says St. Bonaventure in the *Itinerary*, "is not freed in eternal things by meditation, nor does it repose in them, until by contemplation what it sought is shown to it; but as soon as it has found what it sought, the spirit by a kind of acquaintance, fastens on it with admiration, and then meditation has passed into contemplation." But long before that, the humble wonder which the Saints' lives excite in us will enable us to find in them, what St. Augustine says the same wonder helps us to find in Scripture. "For admiration rouses the desire to draw that, which causes us to wonder, and it is in this way that the



spirit of man, sounding the depths and sublime mysteries, couched beneath the language of the prophets, draws Jesus Christ out of the secret places of the Holy Scriptures, as the fisher draws the fish with line and hook." There is a great blessing in seeking Him, a greater blessing in finding Him; and what more practical than to be blessed by Him, whether we seek Him and seem to find Him not, or find Him because we have sought Him, or find Him where we never dreamed of seeking?

S. Gregory the Great thus speaks of this wonder, and of the true worship which it contains. (Morals. ii. 10.) "It is after another manner that the angels speak to God, as in the Apocalypse of God they say, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom; for the voice of the angels in the praises of God is the very admiration itself of inward contemplation. To be struck dumb at the marvels of Divine Goodness is to utter a voice, for the emotion of the heart excited with a feeling of awe is a mighty utterance of voice to the ears of a Spirit that is not circumscribed. This voice unfolds itself as it were in distinct words, while it moulds itself in the innumerable modes of admiration. God, then, speaks to the angels when His inner will is revealed to them as the object of their perception; but the angels speak to the Lord when by means of this, which they contemplate above themselves, they rise to emotions of admiration."

We can but allude briefly here to these various sources of interest, which many find in the Lives of the Saints: and find in them, be it re-

membered, in proportion to the bold keenness and childlike simplicity of their faith. Surely in these days when the truths of God are "diminished" among the children of men, we may say that the first thing we need is faith, and the second thing faith, and the last thing faith also. The heart of charity waxes cold, and the arm of hope numb, in proportion as the eye of faith grows dim.

It may sound like a contradiction or a conceit, yet in truth there is nothing which so brings home to us the beauty, the glory, and the security of faith, as the study of the wonders in the Lives of the Saints. Ecstasies are nothing to the magnificence of faith; visions are less clear than the light of faith, less meritorious, less worthy of God and less dear to God; strange heights of prayer are but as mountains in the shade, compared to the soft misty brightness on the holy summit of pure faith. And yet this light of faith, with its privileged freedom from delusions, is open to us all, in the lowest walks of Christian precept and ordinary obedience. Faith by an intelligible exaggeration may be said to comprehend God; for it proposes Him to us simply as He is, simply as God, in all His vastness and variety of divine perfections, whereas a vivid glimpse of some one attribute is all that is accorded to a vision. When God speaks to us by faith, says S. Francis of Sales, He does it in the way of inspiration. In this life we cannot know God as He is, neither by vision nor rapture: but by faith we at least believe in Him as He is, and we can do Him no higher honour while in this state of pilgrimage. This has been well stated by F. Nouet

(Conduite. i. 94). He says; "We cannot obtain perfect union, which is the end of prayer, except in two ways. One by the light of glory which makes us see God clearly, uniting that adorable object to our understanding without intervening medium and without species. The other by a light of grace, which serves to dispose and prepare us for this sovereign happiness. Now among all the means which prepare us for it, that which has most proportion and resemblance to the light of glory, is the light of faith, which S. Thomas calls on that account a ray, a spark, an outflow, a participation, of the beatific light. For all the consolations, all the sensible devotion, all the visions, revelations, interior words, and in fine, all that the understanding can conceive, all that the will can taste, all that the imagination can picture to itself, all that the appetite could desire, all that the senses could take in, have no proportion with God. God is in nowise that which all this represents to us. He is infinitely above it all. Faith is the one thing which proposes Him to us as He is, and it has this resemblance to the light of glory, that it believes God such as He is, while the other sees Him clearly such as He is. Hence comes the great credit which faith enjoys with God, who can refuse nothing to prayer made in the light of an heroic faith. This ought wonderfully to console those who have no sublime elevations of spirit in prayer; for even those who have them, if they wish to go to God in the way at once most lofty and most secure, must raise themselves above all these extraordinary favours, and walk by the

path of faith, that through darkness they may reach light, and by blinding themselves they may be illuminated." It is well to bear this in mind, now that we are going to speak of the sources of interest there are in the admirable and less imitable portion of the Lives of the Saints.

1. The first source of interest is in the variety of the ways in which God vouchsafes to lead the souls of His servants, disposing all things so strongly and yet so sweetly. The harmony which there is in all their ways, even in those that seem to contradict each other, brings out the difference between divine wisdom and the maxims of the world, and fills the soul with a sense of joyous wonder. Just as upon sanctifying grace, set in motion by the visitations of actual grace, the whole structure of Christian ascetics is raised, so upon the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, called out by the actual impulses of the same Blessed Spirit, the spiritual man beholds three marvellous temples rise, the temples of mystical theology, full of supernatural lights, and hung over with glittering trophies of the Saviour's love, and beautified by innumerable and varying reflections of the Divine Perfections.

As in the ascetical, so also in the mystical system, the three theological and the four cardinal virtues, are the seven pillars of the temples; only they are elicited or exercised in a different way. As this matter is somewhat important, and throws great light on the lives of the Saints, as well as makes several remarks in this Essay more clear, we may be excused for drawing it out at some length. The Catholic writers on the virtues seem for the most

part to follow the teaching of Plato, rather than that of Aristotle, so far as regards the cardinal virtues. That great philosopher divided them into the civil virtues, the virtues of purification, the virtues of the purified soul, and the virtues of the ideal Goodness, which is God. So S. Thomas illustrates the four cardinal virtues as civil virtues, by the following references : Prudence, 3 Kings, iv. 29; Justice, Ps. lxxi. 12; Fortitude, Eccclus. vii. 6; Temperance, Eccles. x. 17:—as virtues of purification; Prudence, Prov. iii. 13, Matt. x. 16. Temperance, Tobias iii, 16, Job xxxi. 9 10; Justice, Eccles. iv. 33; Fortitude, Tobias v. 13. And these last enter into the notion of the heroic exercise of virtue, as well as those of the purified soul, which belong to the highest Saints, though this is contrary to the opinion of some writers.

Our readers must kindly bear with this dry statement, which may be illustrated first of all, by what is said by F. Antonio Gonzales, the Dominican, who wrote a dissertation on the virtues of S. Rose of Lima. His words are given in Benedict XIV. Having premised that heroic virtue is a certain eminence of virtue in its highest degree, and having divided the virtues into those of the civil class, of purification, and of the purified soul, and having observed that ordinary virtue corresponds to the *via purgativa*, virtue of purification to the *via illuminativa*, and virtue of the purified soul to the *via unitiva*, he concludes as follows: "We infer from hence, that virtue in the path of illumination is not heroic, inasmuch as it acts not with readiness and delight, but with diffi-



culty, because of the indolence of the will, which is not yet inflamed by the ardent union of love. Only, therefore, virtue in the state of union, has this facility, inasmuch as it worketh above the ordinary measure, easily, and without violence or opposition of the will. Wherefore, just as any virtuous man ordinarily acts in things of small and trifling account, so he who has attained to the happy state of union, deals with things most difficult, for the love of God, with continual readiness, with a tranquil mind, and as it were, naturally. Accordingly S. Thomas and other authors say that heroic virtue does not belong to the process of purification, but to the purified soul; that is, it is virtue in the state of union. But the union with God, in which heroic virtue consists, is not that union which is ordinarily made by grace in the path of purification, but it is the mode of union that exists between the already purified soul and God, by a certain substantial contact, whereby He is felt to be present and united with it. Then does that union take place, when the spiritual powers of the soul, so far as the condition of this life permits, cling unto God; the intellect, too, by almost continual, and as it were, evident knowledge of Him; and, lastly, the will and the love not merely of desire, but, in a manner, of enjoyment, since it is the possession of God, although imperfect, because He is not clearly seen."

This is the one opinion; we may be allowed to call it the least probable. The opposite view is that the virtues of purification, although it is an imperfect state, may yet be heroic, and so sufficient for canonization. Cardinal de Lauræa says: "A

similitude unto Christ, which arises from the heroicity of virtue, does not consist in such an entire and perfect purification of the passions, that these are quiescent, without any perturbation at all, as they will be in the Blessed, and as they were in Christ our Lord, and in the Blessed Virgin ; also, this similitude unto Christ may consist in a certain relative purification, which, without taking away absolutely the fuel of sin, and the passions, restrains them so that they hardly rise at all, or very slightly." The Auditors of the Rota, in their report in the cause of S. Peter Regalati, write thus : " The virtues are possessed in two ways ; first, in a common and human way, and thus are the virtues called civil, as man is a social being ; secondly, in a way excellent and eminent, and as it were, divine ; and such virtues are called heroic or Divine. The way in which these heroic virtues are possessed is also two-fold ; one, when man is striving towards perfection, and thus are they purifying virtues ; the other when man has already attained to it as far as is possible in this life, and then they are called the virtues of a purified soul, like those of the most Blessed Virgin, and some who in the world have reached perfection. For the purpose of canonization, however, these virtues of a purified soul are not necessary, but it is enough that they should belong to the course of purification, *which are equally heroic.*" Cardinal Capisucchi, in his suffrage in the cause of the Venerable Bellarmine, and F. Garzoni, General of the Servites, in the same cause, maintain the like opinion in a very striking way ; so that Benedict XIV. thus sums up (i. 59) : " In a word, the readiness,

alacrity, and pleasurable feeling, requisite for a man to be said to work heroically, do not exclude the passions, but are compatible with them, and so much the more if they be in a low degree."

But we have stated above, and we know that we are not borne out in it by all mystical writers, that the edifice of mystical theology is built entirely upon the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Now the truth or falsehood of this view will depend in great measure on the question debated in the schools, whether in order to be exercised in an heroic degree, the virtues must necessarily have one of the seven gifts annexed to them, and accompanying them. Maderna admits that in our Blessed Lord all His operations were by the gifts of the Holy Spirit ; but that in the Saints these gifts only sometimes concur, and are not necessary to heroic virtue, because the intensity of a habit is of itself sufficient to produce the requisite ease, promptitude, and pleasurable feeling. Cardinal de Lauræa is not content with this, as he considers the intensity of the habit will not do all that is asked of it, and that there needs a new principle, higher, nobler, and more efficaciously exciting, and this can be nothing else but one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Benedict XIV. gives it in favour of the Cardinal's view, as being more in accordance with the mind of S. Thomas, and Rosignoli thus beautiful enforces it in his treatise on the discipline of Christian perfection. "Then doth God Himself alone move the mind of a man, not only by the infusion of the theological and moral virtues, but also by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are enumerated in the book of Isaias, wisdom, understanding,

counsel, fortitude, science, piety, and fear of the Lord, which are the most excellent supernatural habits, and always accompany charity. For although God always has an open entrance into the soul of man, by the infused virtues, whether theological or moral, yet for the exercise of the highest offices of virtue, He imparts to man those highest gifts, whereby, as it were by chains binding it to Himself, He turns the soul in all directions, whither He wills. Such as these the philosophers happily called heroic actions, or the actions of a purified soul. But the Holy Fathers called them spiritual, deific and Divine. For they which are breathed upon by this Divine Spirit, are not so much men, as in a manner gods; such as were so many patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and apostolic men, who by reason of these most admirable gifts, are looked up unto by mortals, as persons greater than ordinary, as heavenly men." Thus in the view of these actions, with which mystical theology is concerned, the gift of understanding must quicken the exercise of faith, that of fear the virtues of hope and temperance, that of wisdom the exercise of charity, while prudence calls in the gifts of science and of counsel, justice the gift of piety, and fortitude the gift which bears its own name. This theory will be found in practice to give out divisions and subdivisions of mystical theology, less teasing and less like faulty division, if we may venture to say so, than those followed by several mystical writers.

Now to return to our Mystical Temples. There is first of all the temple of prayer, the various kinds of contemplation, the ways of God dealing

with souls at prayer, and all those deeps of the hidden life which the spirit of man sounds and explores at prayer. There are many things there far above him who gazes; perhaps all of them are so. And yet they feed his soul, even while they kindle his desires; and he seems to be practising for heaven while he is learning love and awe amid the overpowering mysteries of that shrine; just as a child learns so much in the beauty of a church and before the burning lamp of the tabernacle, whose dread significancy he is yet too young to comprehend.

Then again there is another temple of the states of the soul, into which it pleases God to throw it; and this is hardly less marvellous than the first. Therein are all those mysterious purgations of the spirit and interior trials which are the preludes to the higher degrees of union with God, the espousals and the marriage of the soul.

Therein are the ten amazing lives of Divine Love, which St. Bernard, St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure expound: the Salutary Languishing, Cant. ii. 5. the Unceasing Search, Ps. civ. 4. the Persevering Labour, Gen. xxix. 20. the Unweary Endurance, Matt. v. 10. the Impatient Desire, Ps. lxxxiii. 2. the Swift Course, Ps. cxviii. 32. the Vehement Daring, Ps. lxxii. 25, 26. the Indissoluble Binding, Phil. i. 21. iii. 20. Gal. ii. 20. the Burning Sweetness, Ps. xxxviii. 4. and last of all the Perfect Similitude, 2 Peter i. 4.

Therein are souls likened to the Passion of their Lord, with wounds and crowns, which are sometimes visible in their bodies, and sometimes are known only to themselves. There, too, are lives,



which live on the Blessed Eucharist alone, for like our Lord, they have other food that those around them wot not of. There are persons reduced to the simplicity of our Saviour's Holy Childhood, like Sister Margaret of Beaune, M. Olier, and some others. There, too, are the wounds of love, its chains, its langours, its swoons, its unions, of which mystics tell us. It would be endless to enumerate them all. But to him who looks on these things from far off, and turns dizzy at the view, how dwarfed does all the world appear, how weak the bands of temptation, like the mere withs that Sampson snapped, and how full of rest, inexplicable rest, is the thought of God, and of God's delight to be with the children of men.

Then there is the third temple, the museum of the gifts of God. There are visions, raptures, extacies, flights, glories, healings, tongues, prophecies, discernments of spirits. There are strange graces which have no name. There also is the visible companionship of angels, and their sensible presence; there, too, are Divine locutions of various kinds, which S. John of the Cross has classified. There also are gifts whereby the senses can tell, nay, as in S. Pascal's case, inanimate relics, where the Body of Jesus is in the Blessed Sacrament. There also are the delicate operations of the five spiritual senses, the taste and touch of the will, and the sight, hearing, and smell, of the understanding, of which the mystics record such transporting effects.

This is one of the most difficult points in mystical theology, and one about which writers

most of all contradict each other. One thing, scholastic philosophy, to which mysticism must after all submit, imperiously requires, that these exterior senses should not be considered distinct faculties from the memory, understanding, and will. The doctrine seems to have come first from the book *De Spiritu et Anima*, so long attributed to S. Austin.

Those who wish to pursue this interesting subject will find the true doctrine in S. Bernard's book on the nature of Divine Love. But the text book of all the modern mystics has been S. Bonaventure's *Seven Paths to Eternity*, particularly the sixth path. Da Ponte's general Preface on Mental Prayer, prefixed to his *Meditations*, and the thirteenth chapter of the third treatise of Scaramelli's *Direttorio Mistico*, may be consulted with advantage. Boudon, in his *Kingdom of God*, might mislead by his phraseology, as, what he means by the interior senses are only four, and are the common sense, the imagination, the "estimative" faculty, and the memory, and have nothing in common with the senses we speak of. But to return.

These are the beautiful things of love, the heavenly profusion of the Spouse of Souls, whereon the reader of the lives of Saints is called to gaze; and what is the effect which they have upon him? He looks upon them from afar; by those heights he measures the lowness of his own attainments; he does not covet to be where he knows full well he should but turn dizzy and fall; on the contrary, he blesses God who has led him of little faith by the common ways, yea, if so be, by the very commonest

of common ways. But he has seen enough for a great work in himself; enough for a contempt of himself he would once have thought unreal; the power of the world over him has gone; scenes or things which once teased or interested him are now as nothing to him; they hardly cross his thoughts. He has seen God at work in His most honoured yet secret laboratory, the souls of saints; he has had glimpses and realizations of another world, and they have purified his spirit, killed old passions, sown fresh loves, and have made a new man of him, because, above all other effects, the sight and knowledge of these things have humbled him exceedingly, these three temples of Prayer, and States, and Gifts.

When we speak of the dependence of all the supernatural visions and revelations of the Saints upon scholastic theology, we must not be understood to rule it absolutely, for that would be going beyond the moderation of theologians themselves. It is difficult to speak too strongly on the subject, because of the countless delusions which haunt the higher walks of the spiritual life, yet to make the rule absolute would be a dangerous exaggeration. Hurtado wrote a tract on the crimes which generate a suspicion of unsoundness in the faith, and in it he says, speaking of private revelations. "A revelation which is against the common opinion of the fathers and theologians is not for that reason diabolical, but nevertheless it requires greater attention, and a more severe examination." Del Rio, in his disquisitions on Magic, a book which may be recommended to the perusal of those who are interested in mesmer-

ism, admits that there may occur in the private revelations of the Saints some things inconsistent with reason and truth, according to the common opinion of theologians, but he says, "We deny that there is anything in their revelations which is plainly contrary to the sincerity of the Catholic faith, or which cannot be reconciled with it. If anything should perchance contradict the more general opinion of the schoolmen, it is not therefore to be condemned at once as erroneous; for, piously and prudently understood, it may be established on the authority of approved writers and sound reason."

Benedict XIV. quotes Matteucci as teaching that a private revelation is not to be considered false, because it involves even circumstances about our Blessed Lord or our dear Lady which are not in Scripture, tradition, the definitions of the apostolic See, or the writings of the Fathers; for he maintains, that the definitions of the popes, fathers, or theologians, are not contradicted by doctrines explaining what those definitions neither explain nor contain, and that there is nothing strange in a private person having a revelation on a matter not decided by the Church. To illustrate his meaning, he puts the dispute between the Thomists and the Scotists, whether if Adam had not sinned Christ would have come in virtue of the present decree, and he says there is no reason why we may not suppose that God should reveal the true answer to any one. But then he objects to himself, may I not be accused of novelty of doctrine? To this he replies, that "that kind of novelty is to be avoided, which introduces new doctrine, which enjoins another faith, and

another rule of life, or breaks up Christian discipline, or is hurtful to the salvation of the souls, and tends to their destruction.”

The great pontiff, Benedict XIV., who is our guide in all questions of this nature, the St. Thomas of canonization, speaking of the same charge of novelty of doctrine, says, (iii. 369,) “Our faith, indeed, as to its substance, has not increased, although now some things are explicitly believed, *which formerly were not known.*” S. Thomas, in the *Secunda Secundæ*, asks, whether the articles of the faith have increased in the course of time, and gives the following answer: “As to the substance of the articles of the faith, there is no increase of them in the course of time, for whatever later generations believe was contained, though implicitly, in the faith of the fathers who have gone before us. But as regards the explanation, the number of the articles has increased, because some things are explicitly known to later generations, which to former generations were not explicitly known.”

There are some curious instances of revelations at issue with theology given by Gerson in his tract on the Humanity of Christ. When the revelations of Sister Mary of Agreda were examined by the Holy Inquisition in Spain, F. Ossorio, a Jesuit, put in a celebrated suffrage which is quoted by Pope Benedict, wherein he maintains that certain discrepancies with scholastic theology, or the disclosure of things not contained in definitions, were no bar to the approval of the revelations of S. Bridget and S. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, and so can be none to the approval of those of Sister Mary of Agreda. On



the other hand Gravina, in his *Lapis Lydius*, and Arauxo, in his *Moral Decisions*, maintain that all revelations are to be rejected whereby a matter is said to be revealed, which is still matter of opinion, and not defined by revelation. It is plain that Benedict XIV. is of the contrary opinion.

But it is on the death-bed chiefly that the sweet variety of grace is manifested at once most openly and most affectionately. In the awfulness of the struggle, and all but in the presence of God's eternal judgments, the soul acts with the most unaffected solemnity, and the senses being deprived of their activity, really formed habits come uppermost and disclose themselves. Scacchus has a very striking passage about this in his *Notes of Sanctity*, (sect. 5. c. 6.) from which Benedict XIV. has drawn so largely. "In the last agony and struggle of the servants of God are clearly seen their habits of virtue, their desire of eternal, and contempt of temporal things; and on that account all that happens to them in the last moments of their life has to be carefully considered: namely, in the Acts of those devout men, whose worship, beatification and canonization the Church has to determine. For, as virtue is a habit, as we have already said and proved, and as the essence of virtue lies not in the act, but in the habit, as all theologians and philosophers teach, in the last agony, therefore, the acquired habit of virtue principally manifests itself and shines forth when the natural senses and natural powers, both interior and exterior, embarrassed by the strength of disease, are prevented from exerting their own functions. Then, indeed, we doubt not

that some acts, as it were involuntarily, proceed from habits acquired in the long practice of virtue, and, therefore, habits of virtue, already acquired, must be of necessity ascertained from the acts of that last agony. For this cause we say that the whole conduct of servants of God in their last agony must be considered, such as sayings, movements of the body, of the eyes, groans (if any) and other things separately, the words they utter against the enemy, and of exhortation to the bystanders, and finally, those, by which in dying, they commend themselves to God; so that not only the faithful may learn from their example, how to depart out of this world, but that we may be able to derive proofs from these signs, of the habit of the evangelical virtues, evangelical perfection and holiness."

This doctrine of Scacchus may minister consolation to some who have been afflicted by the circumstances under which their friends or relatives, recently converted, have died. Converts, professing a warm and ardent devotion to our Blessed Lady and S. Joseph, have drawn near their end, and in that last hour our Blessed Lady seems to be passed over, or certain adjuncts of Catholic devotion, such as the frequent sprinkling of the bed with holy water, not to be rightly valued. What was uppermost in their devotional conversation when well hardly makes its appearance at that solemn crisis, and the religious feelings actually expressed are such as might be expected from a pious Protestant dying in good faith, the desire of the Sacraments always excepted. We know the case

of a person who was supposed to be in his last agony, and who, during the few months which had elapsed since his conversion seemed to have a strong devotion to the Mother of God, and especially to her Immaculate Conception; and yet, when he was assured he had but a few minutes to live, and he was already facing, as best he could, the eternal judgments, he never called on our Blessed Lady, nor alluded to her existence. He seemed to see nothing before him but God, and what was distinct was rather even the Person of the Eternal Father than of our dearest Lord. Now this is often painful to Catholic friends. A cold chilling doubt comes, whether after all the faith of the departed was right, whether there were not some lingerings of old heresy, that evil spirit once exorcised, or whether from bad confessions or some secret fall in the incommunicable temptations of that last hour he had become Satan's prey, or whether he had not been insincere and hypocritical in his loud professions of orthodox devotion when in health. But these are only the cruel refinements of self-torture, which either excessive grief or wild affection wreak upon themselves. It is plain the true account of the matter is that these persons have not been long enough in the Church to have acquired complete habits of Catholic devotion; and just in proportion to their piety and devotion, according to their light, before their conversion, so will be the absorbing strength of the old habits and old traditions of their past religious life. Let it not be doubted that Mary may be at many a death-bed, assisting in all the plenitude of her

majestic love and her maternal rights, when not so much as her name trembles on the sufferer's lips; and that the evil spirits fly as truly from the drops of water wherein the might of the Cross and the benediction of the Threefold Name, and the hallowing of the Immaculate Church of Christ resides, though the faith of the dying man in these blessed helps has not yet passed into a formed habit, and so is now obscured by the mists of suffering and exhaustion. They who die brethren of Jesus must needs die in Joseph's arms; for the Lord's brethren must be Joseph's children; and the Guardian Angel will not forget to call him, though the sufferer may forget to invoke him, nor will the dear patriarch neglect the office to which Jesus has appointed him, because in the poor dying convert pain and weakness assert their empire, and the old memories rise up from hidden springs and inundate later ones. Nay, the Church too, sweet Mother, thinks lightly of the lips alone, and her golden key opens the treasure of indulgences to him who, in that last hour, has the names of Jesus and Mary in his heart, and has been in the habit of saluting them in health. Why should grief be curious to find a shallow in the unfathomable mercies of the hour of death? God is most present when most needed; and if His love is so prodigal, exuberant, and wonderful in less necessities, why should we dream otherwise than that it surpasses all comprehension in the greatest necessity of all? Think of Jesus, and it is easier to believe that many are saved who seem to make bad deaths than

that one was ever lost who made what looked like a good one.

Yet even when thus in the awful presence of their Judge, the Saints do not feel alike. There is no uniformity of awe and sacred fear, because of the dreadfulness of the crisis. The shape and fashion of their sanctity comes out with more individuality than ever; and the diversity of the operations of the Holy Ghost stands out before us, like an illumination. There is the famous case of St. Martin, which exemplifies the various, even opposite conduct, of the same virtue, the virtue of humility. When he came to die, Sulpicius Severus, his biographer, tells us that he said, "Lord! if I am still necessary to Thy people, I refuse not to labour: Thy will be done." The words have become a sort of proverb in the Church. Long after, St. Thomas of Villanova pronounced the following panegyric on the words of St. Martin: "O noble expression O! admirable charity! Did he say less than Moses or Paul? Moses prayed to be blotted out from the book of life for his people: Paul wished to be an anathema from Christ for his brethren; Martin, for the sheep committed to his charge, not only endures, but prays and entreats that he might be detained from glory. The glorious prelate had one foot already in Paradise, and he draws it willingly back, that he may serve his brethren. He had securely reached the desired shore; through love of his children he returns to sea, and for his beloved sheep, like a good shepherd, exposes himself again to the dangers of shipwreck." St. Thomas of Villanova comes to die himself, and Benedict XIV. tells us



out of the Bull of his canonization, that he also used the same words as St. Martin, though they are not recorded in F. Maimbourg's life of the Saint. When our own S. Philip came to die, the Bull of Canonization relates of him, that "when he was lying sick, and those who stood beside him begged him, at least for their sake, to pray to God in the words of St. Martin, Lord! if I am still necessary for Thy people, I refuse not to labour, he replied with the greatest humility, I am not St. Martin, neither have I ever thought myself such an one as he: if I thought I was necessary for you, I should believe myself to be lost." Look also at the death-bed of St. Francis of Sales, assisted by Father Fourier, provincial of the Jesuits in Lyons: "But though Fourier encouraged him again to recite the prayer of St. Martin, Lord! if I am still necessary for Thy people, I refuse not to labour, he never could be persuaded to use it: he replied, I am an unprofitable servant, unprofitable, unprofitable!"

So also we find another curious manifestation of humility, in the death-beds of those who have summed up their good works to those who stood by. Who more humble than St. Bernard? yet when he was dying, he said: "Three things I commend to your imitation, which, in the course I have run, I remember to have observed, according to my ability. I trusted less to my own understanding than to that of another. When injured, I did not seek to punish the wrong-doer. I would give scandal to no one, and if it happened that I did, I removed it as well as I could." Palladius in his *Lausiac* history gives the following as the dying words of

the Abbot Anuph, "From the time I possessed the name of our Saviour upon earth, no falsehood has ever proceeded out of my mouth. I have partaken of no earthly food, but an angel from heaven has daily sustained me with celestial bread. Saying these and such like things, on the third day he gave up his spirit, which was immediately taken by angels and the choir of martyrs, and carried to heaven, while they (his disciples) looked on, and heard the hymns that were chanted." Similar also were the last words of the Abbot Pambo, "I do not remember ever to have eaten the bread of idleness; *and I do not repent of anything I have ever said, even to this hour.*" This anecdote of the famous solitary of the desert of Nitria acquires great light from the account of his first essay in the eremitical life, as it is given by Father Marrin, the Minim, in his *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert* (ii. 163). It appears that S. Pambo left the world in his youth, and before he had learned to read. Accordingly, on his arrival in the desert, and before he had put himself under the spiritual direction of the great S. Antony, he asked an aged solitary to teach him some psalms, and enable him to learn them by heart. The good father gave him for his first lesson those words of the 38th psalm, "I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." These words went to Pambo's heart. He said they were quite enough for the present. He forgot his ambition to know psalms by heart, and took the words rather for his rule of life, though it seemed at first sight an odd rule for a solitary in the desert. However, the bargain was,

that as soon as he had mastered those words, he was to return to his preceptor, and take another lesson. Six moons passed, and there was no Pambo. The aged solitary knew the wiles of the devil, and was affectionately solicitous about the perseverance of his young disciple. At last one day he found him, and gently rebuked him for not having returned to his cell for another lesson. Pambo replied that he had not learned the first one yet. Later in life one of his friends jokingly asked him if he had learned that first lesson yet. He replied that he had barely done so, though he had been nineteen years about it. This enables us to understand his dying words.

In the sixth lection of the second nocturn on the Octave of St. Dominic, in the Dominican Breviary, the following fact is quoted, which is given at length in F. Malvendas' *Annals*, "Then having sent for twelve of the elder and more eminent fathers, he (S. Dominic) made a general confession of all his sins to the prior of the convent at Bologna; and when that sacred duty had been performed, he said to those around him, Lo, my most dear brethren, by the singular grace of God I am a pure virgin at this day: if you too will cultivate a purity, you will wonderfully advance in sanctity of life and the sweet odour of noble reputation."

Who is not reminded by all this of that holy boasting, which by an impulse of the Holy Spirit the great Apostle gave vent to in his second epistle to the Corinthians? Who does not remember the words of holy Job, xxix. 14. "I was clad with justice: and I clothed myself with my judgment as

with a robe and a diadem. I was an eye to the blind and a foot to the lame. I was the father of the poor, and the cause that I knew not I searched out most diligently?" Or the words of Ezechias, (Isaias xxxviii.) "I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight?" or those of Sara, (Tobias iii. 16.) "Thou knowest, O Lord, that I never coveted a husband, and have kept my soul clean from all lust. Never have I joined myself with them that play; neither have I made myself a partaker with them that walk in lightness?" or those of Nehemias, (2 Esdras v. 19.) "Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people?"

Yet the same virtue of humility moved S. John of the Cross, as Father Philip of S. Paul tells us, "not to suffer them to relate in his presence, what he had endured in the reformation of his order. saying that his sins only were to be mentioned, and the merits of Christ's Passion." Nay, in one cause of a servant of God, whose name is not given, this humility formed a difficulty. Benedict XIV. thus relates the incident: "When I was Promoter of the Faith, I objected, in the discussion of the cause of a certain servant of God, that he commended himself to God in his last agony, placing his trust in His mercy only, to the exclusion of those works of mercy which he had done in his life-time. I said it was matter of faith that the just truly and properly merit by works of piety, as it is said in S. Matthew, Your reward is very

great in heaven; and that the Council of Trent anathematized those who maintained that the just ought not, on account of the good works done by them in God, to expect and hope for eternal recompense from God through His mercy and the merits of Jesus Christ, even though they may persevere in well doing and in keeping the Divine precepts unto the end: and that it condemned also those who maintained that the good works of a justified man were the gift of God in such a sense, as not to be also the merits of the justified; or that the justified man by good works which are done by him through the grace of God, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of eternal life, if he dies in a state of grace, and an increase also of glory. But the postulators earnestly contended in reply, that the same holy Council taught that, as no pious man ought to doubt of the mercy of God, so also every one, considering himself and his own weakness, may be in fear and dread of his own grace; and because in many things we all offend, every one ought to have before his eyes severity and judgment, as well as mercy and goodness, and therefore the servant of God, in question, because of the doubtfulness of his own justice, and the danger of vain-glory, rested all his trust in the mercy and goodness of God alone. It is therefore written in Daniel ix. 18. 'It is not for our justifications that we present our prayers before Thy face, but for the multitude of Thy tender mercies,' and in St. Luke xvii. 10. 'When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants.' In the collect for Sexagesima Sunday, the



Church thus prays, 'O God, who seest that we confide in no action of our own;' and in the collect of the secret in the second Sunday in Advent, 'Since we have no merits to plead, assist us by Thy protection;' and in the Canon of the Consecration, 'Into whose company, do Thou, we beseech Thee, admit us, not considering our merits, but granting us Thy forgiveness.' The subject is explained at length by Thomas Stapleton, Cardinal Bellarmine, and many others."

There were others to whom the thought of their good works came at the hour of death as a temptation from the evil one. Maffei mentions something of this sort in his life of St. Ignatius; and Thomas à Kempis tells us that Rupert de Silvà, a canon regular, was harassed in his last agony by a devil, who appeared in the likeness of a monk lately deceased, and tried to breed in him thoughts of vain-glory, by representing to him the good works he had done.

In most men humility would lead them to wish to see their dying bed surrounded by priests, religious and devout friends, to help them with spiritual comforts in that dire extremity. The same undoubted humility caused St. Romuald to send all away that he might die alone. St. Peter Damian thus relates the story: "On a certain day, his bodily strength began to fail, and the disorder growing upon him, he became greatly fatigued. Towards sunset, he commanded the two brothers who were by him, to go out, shut the door of the cell after them, and return in the morning to say matins with him. They, anxious about his end, went out unwillingly, not indeed to rest themselves:

but, lest their master should die, they remained near the door of the cell in painful anxiety about that talent of precious treasure. They tarried for some time, and listened attentively with curious ears, but when they heard neither the movements of his body nor the sound of his voice, they conjectured truly what had happened, and breaking open the door, rushed violently in, kindled a light, and found the body of the saint lying on the ground, his blessed soul having been carried to heaven. The celestial pearl lay there, as it were, neglected, but to be laid up with honour, in the treasury of the Great King. He died as he had foretold, and passed to the place for which he hoped."

Again, humility would most of all prompt men to seek eagerly for the last sacraments and fortifying rites of the Church when in their agony. This is so strongly felt, that in the Congregation of Rites enquiry is always made upon this head; and Benedict XIV., when promoter of the faith, objected, but groundlessly, to the canonization of S. Vincent of Paul, on the ground that he had not received the Viaticum. He had in fact communicated that morning. Yet this very humility led S. Ignatius, who knew by revelation he was dying, not to ask either for the Viaticum or Extreme Unction. It is one of the most singular passages in the Lives of the Saints, and curiously characteristic of the saint himself. (Life ii. 41, Orat. Edit.) "Pietro Ribadeneira was questioned on this subject by Bartolommeo Perez, assistant in Spain, who enquired why the holy father did not ask for Extreme Unction when he knew that he was at the point of

death; he replied as follows: It is extremely probable that the Saint had knowledge or received a revelation of his death; otherwise, when he was one who so seldom made a positive affirmation, he would not have repeated it with such confidence to Polanco, or so earnestly sought the Papal Benediction. But his *prudence and humility* prevented his asking for the Viaticum, or for Extreme Unction; for since the doctors considered that his illness was not dangerous and made light of it, he could not ask for the sacraments without saying that they were in error, and that he was better informed about his illness and his death than they were, or else that God had revealed it to him, and the Saint judged that this was inconsistent with the virtues of *prudence and humility*. Having therefore received the sacraments of confession and communion in the ordinary manner, and gently ordered Polanco to ask the Papal benediction, so as to satisfy his devotion as far as he was able, he yielded all the rest to the opinion of the physicians who stood there."

See now how various can be the operation of one virtue exercised only in one act, humility in dying; and let us learn therefore the wisdom of a large heart and wide charity and broad interpretation of other men's actions, while we adore Him of whose profitable manifestations in all their countless diversities, it has been said, "But all these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as He will."

Though it is not necessary for the illustration of our subject now, we may be forgiven for transcribing the account of the death of St. Peter of

Alcantara, which gathers up into itself all the most perfect exercises of humility which could be desired in that last passage. Its own beauty will apologise for its length.

These are the words of the Report of the Auditors of the Rota : “It came to pass, that, in addition to the infirmities under which the servant of God laboured during his life, a fever supervened, of which he believed he should die. While it continued upon him, though he was extremely enfeebled by it, he never omitted to recite the Divine Office. When he saw the affliction of the monks, he began to comfort them, saying, ‘Weep not, my children, for the time is come in which the merciful God will have mercy on me.’ That evening he begged that he might receive the sacrament of the Eucharist, and when it was put off till the morning of the next day, he spent the whole night in most sweet prayer and contemplation; and with abundant tears of sorrow and contrition for his sins, frequently repeated the words of the Psalmist : ‘Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.’ As one guilty of the greatest sins, and as if he were one who for so many years together had not performed the most severe and rigid penance, he implored God to wash him more and more, and to cleanse him from his sins. These words, proceeding from that divine affection, ministered the greatest edification to the brethren present : and it was to them an occasion of shame to see their father, who had spent his whole life in the service of God, in prayer, divine contemplation and penance, thus at its close wash away his sins with tears,

and pray God to cleanse him from them more and more. He also added, Chasten me, O Lord, not according to my sins, but according to Thy great mercy. I hope, indeed, to be saved by Thee through the merits of Thy most holy passion. The day dawned, and when he knew that the most holy Viaticum was coming, although weakened, and like a paralytic unable to move, he threw himself at once, without any assistance, on his knees, and with clasped hands and incredible fervour of spirit worshipped the Divine Sacrament, and received it with the greatest veneration, with tears and holy awe, and begged that at the proper time he might receive the most holy sacrament of Extreme Unction. Then fixing his eyes on the crucifix which he had before him, with a serene countenance, and his spirit as it were on fire, he remained for some time in profound repose, in an extasy, and absorbed in God. When the physician came, the man of God asked him: When will the longed-for time come, and the hour when I shall be delivered from this destruction, and shall enter on the way of life? The physician replied, Father, that hour will soon come, it is now drawing nigh. When the holy man heard this, he was affected with unutterable joy, and turning exultingly to God, he repeated with a joyous look the words of the royal prophet, 'I rejoiced at the things that were said to me; we shall go into the house of the Lord.' Early on the following day the sacrament of Extreme Unction was administered to him; he received it with the greatest devotion and reverence, and with



the most perfect arrangement of his person; and as if suffering from no illness, he recited the psalms alternately with the priest and others. In imitation of his seraphic father S. Francis, he would make proof of his spirit of poverty even in death, so that he might die in that poverty wherein he had been born. Wishing to retain in death not even the habit he had on, he begged the Father Guardian out of charity to bury him in some old habit, having taken off his own. He then caused his children and his brethren to be summoned, and commended to them observance of their rule, with due obedience to superiors; and seeing that the hour of his departure out of this world to everlasting joy was come, he embraced them with his arms full of charity, and gave them his blessing. When this was done, the servant of God became quiet, and in that interior quietness he moved neither hand nor foot for some time. When he came to himself he said to the monks, My children, do you not see the most Holy Trinity, our Lady the most glorious Virgin Mary, and S. John the Evangelist? His face beamed with heavenly joy, and with this divine vision, on bended knees, preaching to, and exhorting his brethren—as the Blessed Mother Theresa says—and repeating certain verses of the psalms, he rendered his soul to God. His bodily eyes remained clear and bright, to the admiration of all, and so continued till his body was committed to the grave.”—pp. 161-3.

To sum up all, let us quote what Father da Ponte says of the variety of God's ways, in his preface to the life of Marina d'Escobar: “Our great God and Lord, who in every age, and time, and

state, is admirable in His saints, would in these our days elect to Himself a venerable virgin, named Donna Marina d'Escobar; in whom He disclosed the immense treasures of His infinite wisdom, charity, and mercy, and the inestimable riches of His grace; conversing interiorly with her, and manifesting to her all the mysteries which the Catholic faith teaches and the holy Church celebrates, in a manner so new, so grand, and so extraordinary, that the favours bestowed on her, are not inferior to those which we read of in the lives of Saints Gertrude, Matilda, Bridget, Catherine of Siena, Teresa, and others like them. Since the powerful hand of God is not shortened, nor His wisdom exhausted, nor His charity destroyed, He knows how, and is willing and able to renew the things done by Him in times past, and even greater things in these our times, so great are the grandeurs which our Lord can disclose of Himself and of His divine perfections, and of the things done for men. And so various are the modes whereby He can disclose them, that after having communicated them to whomsoever He pleases, He always still retains an infinite number to bestow in so many new ways as it would be impossible for us to imagine."

What has been observed under this head of the variety of God's ways, may perhaps serve as a reply to another class of objections. It is said that the Lives of the Saints are monotonous, that one is just like another, and that when you have read one, you have read them all. Looking at the Lives in a literary point of view, we are fain to acknowledge that there is some justice in these objections, al-

though they are stated in an exaggerated way. If we except the historical Saints, and perhaps the founders of orders, there is to the superficial reader a very tiresome sameness. Here are a number of men who left the world in various ways, fasted, watched, wore hair shirts, disciplined themselves, and had a variety of other austerities; they prayed immensely; they imitated our Lord and the Old Testament Saints more or less literally; they ran counter to every worldly maxim they could think of; and after their own fashion they were always trying to do good to others, always getting into scrapes, and always managing to make even good kind of people their enemies. Here is the phenomenon. Very striking. We have nothing to say against it. The Church is for it; so it is all right. Only it is always the same. It is simply a phenomenon. Whether they were bishops, priests, monks, nuns, or lay-people matters little. The accident of position, vocation, or sex, hardly constitutes sufficient difference to vary the interest. As one monkey is like another monkey, so one saint is like another saint. The show is interesting for the first time; but as the novelty wears off, the interest dies away.

No one can deny that there is a great deal of truth in this. It illustrates what we have been saying all along. Depend upon it, in the long run, these Lives must be dull to those who read them for any other object than that of uniting themselves more closely to God. Is it not even the experience of those who are trying to lead spiritual lives, that when they are lukewarm, or are for any cause less

in the presence of God, the Saints' Lives are dull, and seem to give out neither light nor heat? Much more than will this be the case with those who read them merely for the sake of being interested by them.

To those who are endeavouring to draw a spiritual science out of them, the case is widely different. The very similitude of one Saint to another is full of meaning and of teaching. It helps to the discernment of principles. In many cases it animates us with the desire to imitate these heroes of the Gospel. Then again the similitudes bring out the discrepancies all the more strikingly; just as the collector of shells finds special interest in a large assortment of some one class of shells, which he classifies in its subdivisions, and often feels himself creating knowledge as he goes on arranging. The fine shades of grace, the varying conditions under which certain gifts are held and exercised, the shifting hues of the supernatural, the difference of type, and the faintness or boldness of the impressions of the same type,—all these things are as distinct to the eye of the hagiologist, as is the outline of each separate Alp to him who dwells all the year round upon the plains beneath, though it is to the eye of the passing tourist but one gracefully jagged sky-line, with here and there a Monte Rosa or other famous height distinguished from its peers.

We know absolutely nothing of geology; but we have seen a collection of stones. Certainly there were differences; differences in colour, weight, and look; but on the whole it was mightily uninteresting. They were all stones; brown was the predominating hue; many were not to be found in or about the

neighbourhood, yet we should never have noticed these rare specimens if we had kicked them or tumbled over them, as we walked along the road. It was a dull sight; but the secret of the dulness was our own ignorance and want of sympathy. To the geologist each stone made its confession; it told of strange chronologies, of elemental strifes, of volcanic action, of uncomfortable times before the surface of the earth was cooled; it made restitution of queer animals that it had kept these thousand of years, and which were no longer denizens of earth; it spoke of changes of climate and of arctic palms; nay, it even mentioned to its confessor in the lowest of all possible whispers that it was an inveterate impostor, for that after all it was not a genuine honest stone, as it looked, but a collection of compressed and liquefied animals, and it went so far as to reveal how life might be brought out of it again. We will make no boast of our ignorance. It would be a famous recreation to have stones talking to us in this way; and wise men make more than recreation of it. The lawgiver of the Hebrews, and the truth of his history, have been tried at the bar of these stones. Some stones have been naughty in the matter. Nay, other stones, bold and wicked stones they were, have said there was no God, that they made themselves, and matter was eternal. O brown stones! what a science there is in you! You give us new thoughts of God, new notions of His magnificence, new joy and complacency that He is our own Father, and that we shall one day see Him as He is. And when you seem to blaspheme, it is only



bunglers who bring discord out of you, because they know no better.

So is it with the Lives of the Saints. They are full of secrets to those who make a science of them; they are dull to those who look upon them as we do upon the museum of geological specimens. It is no crime not to know geology; it is no crime not to know hagiology. Still there is such a science, and it may be known, by pains, by study, and like other sciences, by natural aptitude, knack, and instinct. But it is dry as a mere speculation; and uncomfortable, where there is no thought of imitation. However to the scientific eye the Saints, like the stones, are very different, often most different when they look most like. They too tell us wonderful things, of the formation of the Church, of volcanic action within her, of marvellous crises, of things which are no longer in the Church, of inhabited deserts, pontifical catacombs, and such like, and also of uncomfortable, though in certain respects enviable times, the old martyr times, when the surface of the Church was by no means cooled. They tell us too about God, His character, His angels, His beatific manifestation of Himself, revelations quite as interesting, and more irreproachable, than the boasts of those would-be-eternal stones.

The geologist is for stones; we are for Saints. To take the lowest view, for our purpose there is no need of a higher,—let every one enjoy his own taste, and abound in his own sense, and admire everybody else's taste, and think there is something in everybody else's sense, provided always no word to the contrary has come from Rome.

2. Another source of interest in the admirable part of the Saints' lives is in the heavenly words revealed in them. If we are not prepared to assert that all these things are unworthy of credence, and that hagiology is nothing but a voluminous imposture, then surely to have words by the saints, the angels, our Blessed Lady, and even our dearest Lord Himself, must be a source of the most intense interest. For instance, He is said to have revealed to Sister Margaret of Beaune, that during His Sacred infancy He went through awful sufferings, especially every Friday, in consequence of the foresight and vision of His Passion. Now, if this be authentic, can it be that to a heart deeply loving Jesus it is not a matter of intense interest and of tearful meditation? When Father Monroy falls asleep on the predella of the altar in the middle of the night, our Lord comes to him and tells him that special devotion to the Eternal Father is pleasing in His, our Blessed Saviour's, sight, and from that hour Father Monroy never could pronounce the words, *Domine sancte, Pater omnipotens, æterne Deus*, in the preface of the Mass, without being inundated with heavenly consolations; and Father Nieremberg tells us he went about the house perpetually crying out, *Diligamus ardentem Patrem æternum*.

Thus, also, to quote a cognate instance, Father Surin, in the account of the graces given him by God and which his superiors constrained him to write by obedience, says that in the impressions made upon him by the interior visits of the Most Holy Trinity, especially by what he calls the *voices* of the Three Divine Persons, the voice of the Father was an un-

speaking gentleness, while that of the Son was an inexplicably beautiful and powerful light, and that of the Holy Spirit a tenderness which he could not describe. Again, he says that the Father appeared as an inexhaustible source of good, the Son as the most choice beauty, and the Holy Spirit as substantial goodness. And still further he illustrates as follows this love of the Eternal Father. "The soul is sometimes so filled with this good, that it cannot explain the sweetness and satisfaction it feels in it. Then God gives it permission to pronounce words of fondling and tenderness, which pass anything human. S. Bernard had good reason for saying that the soul at last gets into such a state, that it thinks of nothing else but *flattering* God in a manner which sounds like folly. He who has read the Italian canticles of S. Francis, will see what it is to speak to God of love. In that state the soul as it were loses itself, or its self-possession, at the sight of that Object of its heart, and not knowing what it does or what it says, it gives itself liberty in what to man's understanding are extravagances, which betray a spirit out of itself, and not knowing what to do or what to become. For more than fifteen years, and even at present, I can call God nothing but *Papa*; and I have often thought of what S. Paul says, that we have in us the Spirit of Jesus Christ who cries Abba, Father! It is a supernatural voice to the soul, but also excessively *delicious*, coming from the bottom of the heart, and which addresses God, sometimes as its dear love, sometimes as its dear father, sometimes as its tender spouse; and it is sometimes so fixed in

the soul, that nothing can hinder this holy liberty. For it is before God as His child, who, although full of fear because of past terrors, is taken by Him, and constrained to receive those caresses which He gives who is the Father from whom all paternity is named in heaven and upon earth. It is true that at the beginning my soul did not dare to call God by these delicious names, which the Spouse alone may pronounce in her wise and sober folly, but the impetuosity of its love drove it on, to satisfy itself with words of tenderness, which reduce the heart to such an extremity as I cannot adequately express.” (p. 330.)

As we are upon the subject of devotion to the Person of the Eternal Father, it may not be amiss to mention the opinions of theologians. The schoolmen teach that we cannot be under a special obligation to any one of the Three Divine Persons, considered apart from the others, because of the received axiom of the schools that whatsoever God operates externally, that the whole Trinity operates. But they add that this does not by any means hinder a special devotion to one of the Divine Persons, for, as they say, *Cultus specialis non presupponit obligationem specialem*. Theophilus Raynaud, in his *Heteroclita Spiritualia*, has a very interesting tract on this devotion; and while he asserts its perfect orthodoxy he gives reasons why there should not be mass or office of the first Person of the Holy Trinity.

During the Pontificate of Innocent XII. some persons, in France, (if we are not mistaken,) asked for the mass and office of the Eternal Father on

the 5th Sunday after Easter, on the ground of the Gospel for that day, which so often refers to God the Father, and also because of its suitableness as preceding the Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. There were great names on the side of the petition, among them Guyet and Da Ponte; and the doctrine of Suarez was with the supplicants, as he says there is no difficulty in honouring one of the Divine Persons separately, whether by the celebration of a feast, or the erection of an altar, or the dedication of a church. Indeed, S. Cyril of Jerusalem, in his catechetical instructions, says that the cathedral at Jerusalem was anciently dedicated to God the Father. When the petition came before the Congregation of Rites, Prospero Bottinio, the Promoter of the Faith, argued against it. His objections, quoted by Benedict XIV., are simply taken from Raynaud's tract, as may be seen by comparing the two; and indeed Bottinio quotes him expressly. It was urged that many things might be lawful and pious, which yet it was not well to celebrate by feast, mass, and office. Secondly, that if a feast of Eternal Father was granted, the Church must go on to grant one of the Eternal Son, not as incarnate, but as proceeding by eternal generation from the Father; and also one of the Eternal Spirit, not as descending on the Church, but as eternally breathed forth from Father and Son. Thirdly, that it might puzzle the common people, and lead to great inconveniences. To this Raynaud adds that the most Holy Trinity is not *propter nos*, but for His own glory, whereas what we celebrate are mysteries and benefits in our behalf;



though it would seem that that argument should have told equally against the institution of the Feast of the most Holy Trinity, extended to the universal Church by John XXII., and the office of which was composed by Alcuin, at the request of S. Boniface of Mayence. Raynaud further adds, that there might as well be a feast of the S. Humanity, apart from the Divine Person, because Suarez, with the consent of nearly all the scholastics, says that even so considered, it is worthy of a special veneration. So also there should be a Feast of the Soul of Christ, (*Corpus Christi* he shows is not of the Body alone,) and of the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

It is observable that neither Prospero Bottinio nor the Blessed Joseph Tommasi, in the Congregation of Rites, quote Raynaud's argument against this feast, on the ground that it is not congruous to multiply feasts in this vale of unhappiness, and so to emulate the continous holyday of the blessed in Heaven. And it is perhaps the more observable, first, because Bottinio's argument is so clearly a recapitulation of Raynaud's tract; and secondly, because of the well known letter of S. Bernard, rebuking the canons of Lyons for introducing the Feast of our Lady's Conception. "What yet remains to be added, think we, to these honours? They reply, That the Conception also should be honoured, which preceded the honoured birth, for if it had not gone first, the other would not have come after. But what if another, for the same reason, were to assert that festal honours should be paid to both her parents? (This the Church has actually done since, in the Feasts of

S. Joachim and S. Anna.) Then some one else might ask the same for her grandfather and grandmother, and their ancestors likewise; and so it would go on to infinity, and there would be no end of feasts. This frequency of joys is for our heavenly country, not for our exile; this multitude of holydays befits citizens, it befits not exiles." (Epist. 176, sect. 6.)

Now, putting aside the direct revelations of S. Bridget, S. Gertrude, S. Matilda, S. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, and others, there are few lives of the Saints in which something is not said or done by the inhabitants of heaven; and really it is hard to understand how these things can be uninteresting, at least where they are believed: for if unpractical for men, why were they spoken? Not surely for the Saints' sake only, else they would not have been manifested to the Church.

3. Again, we find in these lives repeated disclosures of the special efficacy and acceptableness of peculiar devotions in the sight of God. Thus in one life we learn that there is a great power in the words of the *Salve Regina*. Our Lord vouchsafes to reveal to the Blessed Veronica of Binasco, that tears shed over His Mother's dolours are dearer to Him than those shed over His own Passion. He reveals to the Blessed Michele of Fiesole the *Corona del Signore*, which the Church has so liberally indulgenced. To another of His servants He imparts the acceptableness with God, of keeping devoutly the Feasts of the Apostles, for that there is great jubilee in heaven on those days, especially on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, as He told Elizabeth de

la Croix. Now these things are not rules. They may be meant mainly for the person to whom they are addressed. Time and place may qualify them. But if they are not false, are they not interesting?

Again, we read of men desiring to die before certain days, that they may spend the feasts in Heaven, and of the multitude of souls whom our Lady delivers from Purgatory on the Feast of the Assumption. Some saints have even mysterious sympathies with the joys or sorrows of the calendar of the Church. Strange examples of the often unconscious sympathy of holy persons with the calendar may be found in the life prefixed to the visions of Sister Emmerich. These, however, we will pass over, as having as yet but little authority. The following extract from the Life of the Blessed Mary of Oignies in the Bollandists will illustrate our meaning, (p. 421.) "When any great solemnity approached, she would not unfrequently feel great joy for eight days before; and thus, throughout the year, she was variously affected with different feelings, according to what the Church was at that time celebrating. When the festival of any particular saint was at hand, that saint was wont to acquaint her with it, and on the day itself he would pay her a visit, with a great multitude of heavenly spirits, and she would pass the whole day with him in spirit, with great joy and gladness. And thus, from familiar and frequent intercourse with the saints, she learned to distinguish one saint and angel from another, just as a man does his friends and neighbours. And sometimes a saint, who was entirely unknown in that part of

the country, would acquaint her with his festival, which was being celebrated in some distant part, in order that she might rejoice at it. Even when she was told nothing about it, her heart made her feel which were feast days and which were not, for those which were distinguished by any solemnity were more sweet and delightful to her than common days. All the festivals were written in her heart, as in a martyrology. Accordingly, it happened once that she was in a village called Lenlos, in a church dedicated to S. Gertrude, and on the next day there should have been a Feast in honour of S. Gertrude celebrated there, but the priest of that place had not observed it. The saint, however, perceiving within herself that the feast was approaching, could not contain herself any longer; and since the priest did not make his appearance, nor any one to ring the bells for the Vespers on the preceding day, as is usual on such occasions, she rose from her place, and rang the bells herself as well as she could. The priest, hearing this, ran to the church, and asked why the bells were rung; 'For it is not usual,' he said, 'to ring them at this hour, unless on the eve of a feast.' Mary was covered with great confusion and fear, and answered timidly, 'Pardon me, father, but it is a great festival to night, *for I feel the Church overflowing with joy*, though I do not know whose feast it is.' The priest upon this looked over the calendar, and found that the Feast of S. Gertrude ought to be celebrated next day."

And what is said of Blessed Mary, that "she learned to distinguish one saint and angel from

another," is paralleled by what is recorded of that illiterate and poor girl, B. Catherine of Raconigi, and her familiar intercourse with the citizens of heaven. "She drew," says Father Razzi, "beautiful pictures with her wise words, of the appearances of the Mother of Jesus Christ, and said in what she did not resemble her dear Son. She said that the Blessed S. Mary Magdalene was very beautiful, while, on the contrary, S. Martin was naturally ugly, although his soul was beautiful because of the grace which resided there. She said that the martyr S. Agatha, was beautiful, having a full and very beautiful face, of a rather dark colour. She maintained that S. Agnes was beautiful, but very little; her face was plump, and her complexion reddish, and she had curling hair; S. Margaret was of the middle stature; her eyes were large and black. S. Catherine's beauty was perfect, and no fault could be found in it. S. Cecilia was tall and very slender. She described S. Augustine as being considerably tall, and of a dark complexion, and very circumspect in his actions; S. Francis was dark, little, and blear-eyed; S. Antony was small in stature, with a beautiful expression of the eye; S. Bernard was joyous, and rather little. She used to give similar descriptions of many other saints, but we have omitted them for fear of wearying the reader." (Life, p. 399.)

With reference to the passage just quoted, so much as this may be said. The highest kind of visions is called intellectual. In these the mind apprehends divine things without figures and images; and it may do this under two conditions;



either by a special light interpreting the sensible signs of a bodily or an ideal vision, or by a perception of mysteries through a species infused into the intellect by God Himself for that purpose. An ideal vision, the *visio spiritualis* of S. Austin, enables the soul to see by means of species already existing in the imagination; though this, we will venture to say, is certainly not the case exclusively. The visions above referred to of B. Catherine are of the lowest kind, being bodily visions; and in these there is nothing to hinder an admixture of nature. She might have seen pictures of these saints, and while they did really appear to her in vision, they might have seemed outwardly what her imagination had previously depicted them. This is not said in any spirit of scepticism, but to meet, it may be, historical objections. Thus she says S. Bernard was rather little, whereas the words of Gaufridus about S. Bernard in his *Life* (cap. 1.) are, "A stature of fair mediocrity, but nearer to tallness." Cardinal Bona tells us that in his day it was an undecided quarrel between mystics and scholastics, whether there could be in this life an intellectual vision without the intervention of images in the mind. If there were granted an *intellectual* vision of a saint in his yet unrisen body, it is hardly to be thought. a species unlike the reality would be infused.

4. The external signs of favour, and the miraculous powers, which are conferred upon the Saints, are surely interesting, for a variety of reasons, which it would take too long to enter into now. The visible rings of the two Catherines, Agnes, Rose, and Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, the manna which used to fall on

S. Agnes of Montepulciano at prayer, the snow, which hung suspended over the head of S. Peter of Alcantara at prayer, the oil which distils from the relics of the merciful and alms-giving Saints;—surely God did these things to interest us, to teach us, to make an impression upon us. In the matter of miracles, there are, besides the prodigies themselves, many things interesting, as illustrations of Scripture or otherwise. Our Lord promised that His disciples should do certain miracles, and one was to drink poison and not be hurt by it. A person some time ago, investigating the subject of the fulfilment of this prophecy, mentioned the difficulty of verifying it. He said there were many stories of glasses breaking, or of Saints being interiorly warned that what was offered them was poison, but that he had not found a case which was the literal fulfilment of the promise. Now there was reported to be such an one in the life of Suor Domenica del Paradiso, of the third order of S. Dominic, who died in Florence somewhere about the year 1600: yet on investigation the two instances, for there were two, turned out to be miraculous cures after intense suffering from poison; and so not to the point.

It is almost curious how difficult it is to find an instance which does meet the very words of the prophecy, though the substance of the promise has been so often fulfilled. Father Balthazar of Loyola, the Jesuit, who was the son of the king of Fez, and abjured Mahometanism at Malta, converted two thousand Moors. This so exasperated some of the people, that they determined to get rid of him. Accordingly a man presented him with a bunch of

poisoned flowers to smell at. God revealed it to Father Balthazar, who said with a smile to his enemy, "Will you abjure the Prophet's law if I smell at these flowers and escape unharmed?" and it ended in the baptism of the Moor. So again S. Louis Bertrand, the Dominican missionary, was poisoned by a Carribee priest, and he suffered excruciating agonies, and lay at death's door for five days, when he was miraculously cured. In both these cases there was the substance of the promise, but not the letter. So it was with the two cases recorded in the life of Suor Domenica del Paradiso; the promise is hardly fulfilled to the letter; in one instance some grapes were poisoned and given her by her enemies, but great pain and violent vomitings followed, though she was cured without serious harm; and again, when an ignorant druggist sent her some poison, our Lady and S. Dominic appeared and partially cured her, and after that our Blessed Lord in an apparition vouchsafed to complete the cure Himself. This is hardly a literal fulfilment of the words in S. Mark, "If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them." There is no instance we can find in *Pietra Sancta* which meets the words; Maldonatus passes it by without notice, and Cornelius à Lapide says no more on it than this, "They shall drink poison and be none the worse for it, as did the Apostles, and very many of the Saints."

There are two anecdotes in *Piety Exemplified* which illustrate this promise of our Lord. Father Delré tells us that one day the Indians put poison into his food, but that he experienced no inconvenience from it. F. Gollet, missionary at Nimfo,

mentions the following occurrence, which happened to himself:

“An idolater, whom I had engaged in my service as valet, with the hopes of converting him, undertook to poison me. Nothing was more easy; he was my constant cook. He hoped his crime would not transpire, and that he would have time to plunder my effects. He therefore mixed verdigris and sublimate with what he had prepared for my dinner. I had no sooner dined than I experienced a violent head-ache, and an hour later very acute pains in both my eyes, but in one the pain was not unlike the points of needles pricking it. As the sky was very much overcast, and menaced an approaching storm, I attributed my sufferings to the changed state of the atmosphere. I supped at night in the same manner I dined, on poisoned eggs. My cook wished to witness the effect. He remained alone with me during my meal. I spoke to him on the necessity of embracing the Christian religion. He seemed to relish my reasoning, but brought many excuses for wishing to defer his baptism, assuring me, that he would be prepared to receive it in fifteen days; convinced, undoubtedly, that I should not be alive to remind him of his engagement. I passed a very restless night, and in the morning was seized with excruciating pains in my stomach, which continued all that day and the night following, till two, in the morning, when unable to get any the least rest, I arose. I then was seized with violent fits of retching, which caused me to suffer much, and what I disgorged tasted exactly like poison. I took

some theriaca, a kind of treacle, and was presently relieved. I immediately fell upon my knees, to thank God for my preservation. The remainder of the night I spent with the greatest composure. In the morning, I perceived that I had vomited verdigris, mixed with a white drug which was to me unknown, but which I have since been assured was sublimate. There were other indubitable symptoms that what I had taken was poison. Blessed be the God of all mercies, for showing even in so contemptible a servant that He watches over the lives of such as labour in His service, and that He changes even the nature of things most capable of hurting them according to the promise of Jesus Christ, *Et si mortiferum quid biberint non eis nocebit.*"

These stories are, however, not altogether conclusive, neither do we quite know how much authority is to be assigned to them. As to F. Delré's case, missionaries fancy things, neither do we know the quantity or sort of poison he supposed had been mixed with his food. As to F. Gollet's case, the poison did hurt him, so it was merely an instance of a miraculous cure, not of the prevention of the natural consequences of poison. Besides he may have been under-dosed, as the cook seems to have expected some days to elapse before his death; for, to be safe, he promises to receive baptism in fifteen days.

But the most remarkable disappointment in hunting for an instance of the fulfilment of this promise, which no doubt exists somewhere, is the following one. In the sixth volume of Martene's *Veterum*



Scriptorum Monumenta there is a certain dialogue of Paul the Florentine, which Mabillon found in the Laurentian Library. It purports to give an account of the rise of the Servite Order, and the interlocutors are Pietro de' Medici, the son of Cosmo, and Mariano, bishop of Cortona, who had been superior of the Servite convent of the Santissima Annunziata at Florence. In it Paul makes mention of one John, whom he calls *fundamentum aliud ordinis*, and relates with minute circumstantiality, how that there was a certain avaricious citizen of Florence, named Antony. Antony goes out one day for the sake of taking a walk (*deambulationis gratia*) and determines to go and see this John, to find out if he is the holy man people take him to be. John, discerning his spirit, rebukes him very sharply for his covetousness and his harshness to the poor. Antony, partly enraged and partly fearing the democratic tendencies of John's levelling doctrines, resolves to poison him, and sends him by a maid-servant an alms of poisoned wine. Meanwhile this is revealed to John, and when the maid arrives, he says to her, "Now taste that cup which you have prepared for me." She, unaware of her master's diabolical intent, is about to taste the wine, when John stops her, and drinking the wine, he says, "Now go and tell your master I have swallowed all this poisoned cup." At the same moment that John at the convent swallows the wine, and is no worse for it, Antony in his own house falls down dead; and Paul adds very naturally, "The Gospel says, If they shall drink

any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. (Martene. Vet. Script. Mon. vii. col. 576, 577.)

The first difficulty is that in the common catalogues, none of the seven Founders is called John. Their names are usually given as follows : 1, Buonfigliuolo Monaldi, 2, Buonagiunta Manetti, 3, Manetto dell' Antella, 4, Amadio Amidei, 5, Uguccione Uguccioni, 6, Sostegno Sostegni, 7, Alessio Falconieri ; and so they are named in the Processes in the Congregation of Rites. But if we turn to François Malaval's French life of S. Philip Benizi, the fifth general of the Servites, published at Marseilles in 1672, we find (p. 34) the Blessed Buonagiunta Manetti called John, with considerable varieties also in the names of the other founders ; then (p. 52) comes this story, with variations from the narrative of Paul the Florentine in Martene. There it is Manetti who goes to Antony the usurer to rebuke him for cruelty to the poor during a famine, not Antony who takes a walk to see him, and it is while Manetti is making his usual quête through the city. Antony pretends to be converted, and adds that he will send some alms to the convent. The maid-servant (it is still a maid) rings at the convent door, bringing poisoned bread as well as poisoned wine. Manetti says he will not taste it unless the maid eats some of it first. She is about to do so when he stops her, tells her it is poisoned, prophesies that when she gets home, she will find that God has already judged her master ; and then, making the sign of the cross, after the example of S. Benedict, he both eats and drinks and is no worse, and the maid, on reaching home, finds her master's

corpse on the bier. So far we have the substantial fact ; poison is swallowed, and it does no harm to him who swallows ; but the varieties of the story breed suspicion.

Now we pass to Father Pecoroni's Italian history of the Rise of the Servites and the lives of the seven Founders, published in Rome in 1740, and dedicated to Benedict XIV., then reigning. It is compiled from the contemporaneous documents inserted in the passages and judicial relations, which were admitted in evidence by the Congregation of Rites. In page 80 we have this same story. Antony is a merchant, over head and ears in the abomination of usury. Manetti sets his heart on converting him. He makes long prayers for him, and sees him, not once only, but so often, that he becomes quite a nuisance to Antony, who at last, to get rid of the pertinacious saint, feigns conversion, and the more effectually to hinder his future visits, resolves to poison him. Here we have the bread as well as the wine, and the maid-servant ; but no asking her to eat and drink, for God had revealed it all to his servant at prayer, and the corpse of Antony is found not on the bier, but on the ground, where he had tumbled. But there is one more unlucky variation ; instead of eating and drinking and being no worse, Manetti makes the sign of the cross, and lo ! the vessel in which the wine is contained, forthwith breaks to shivers, and the bread in one instant turns black, and becomes a living mass of disgusting worms. And so our instance breaks to pieces also, and we dare not say

the poison was swallowed, and the promise fulfilled to the letter.

The beautiful exposition given to the promise by spiritual writers, is having its fulfilment daily. Confessors drink poison while they drink in the sins of their penitents in the confessional, and it harms them not. Memory loses the power to hold the facts, as it holds other facts; the images fade from off the imagination as fast as they are written upon it; the understanding becomes blessedly inert, and does no more than the judgment of penance there and then requires, while the will seems to change its nature, and when the flames are held to it, it will not burn. This is one of the many ways in which it is given us to feel and handle grace palpably, so that we walk herein by sight rather than by faith. It is one of the daily miracles which are being worked always in the secret places of the Church of God.

To return, there is often teaching also, even in the long and prolix account of the Saints' miracles, as, for instance, they work miracles in a way suitable to their humour and spirit when alive, reminding us of the words of our risen Lord, "See! it is I Myself."

5. How much do we learn also in these lives about the joys of heaven, the horrors of hell, and above all, of the Suffering Church in purgatory? And surely if our future beyond the grave is as engrossing an object with us as it ought to be, such intimations must be deeply interesting to us, not for our own sakes only, but for the knowledge which kindles fresh and more affectionate charity towards our dear dead.

The lives of the Saints lead us far amid the wonders of the bright and beautiful kingdoms of the angels, and the secrets of their affectionate ministries towards ourselves. Who has not been struck with the devotion of the early martyrs to the angels, which forms so striking a feature in their acts? Think of S. Agnes, S. Prisca, S. Eudocia, and S. Cecilia. Then again we have the familiarity of so many of the modern saints with the heavenly spirits, S. Francesca Romana, S. Rose, and S. Joseph of Cupertino. Those who have a special devotion to S. Raphael have naturally a deep interest in his frequent intercourse with S. John of God, and the Blessed Benvenuta of Bojan. But not to encumber our pages with illustrations, we will content ourselves first with the following extract from the journal of Father Balthasar Alvarez, S. Theresa's confessor.

“December 22, 1671.—While I was at my morning prayer, God, by a singular favour, gave me a great inclination for the holy angels, specially for him who was charged to announce to Mary the incarnation of the Word, for him who consoled Jesus in His agony, and for him who offers to the Eternal Father the victim of the holy sacrifice. I felt also a particular affection for those of the blessed spirits who assisted our Saviour in His prayers, His pains, and His journeys, as they assist the just as well, and also for the angels who aid me to fulfil my obligations, for my faithful guardian, and those of the religious entrusted to my care. From this day this devotion is no longer a permitted practice with me, but a duty I am bound by obedience to fulfil, our Lord having



laid it on me as a special command.” And lastly we may adduce the words of Father Surin about his special devotion to the Choir of Thrones. He is writing to the *Mère des Anges*, at Loudun. “The idea of the angels is extremely sweet to me, and I cannot tell you how my spirit is occupied and filled with the thought of their heavenly choirs, and especially those who are called Thrones, by whom many of your enemies, that is, the devils who torment you, have been put to flight. It often seems to me when I am saying mass, as if I were sacrificing to God seated on those spirits.” It need hardly be added how many grave suggestions and interesting lessons are taught us in the lives of the Saints, of the power and malice of the fallen spirits. It is not easy to think of a more personally or practically interesting subject.

6. When we read of the beautiful and marvellous graces which some of the Saints enjoyed, does it not strike us that Jesus, the source of all graces, must have had the same? And does not this often give us new and very reverent views of our dearest Lord? On this head much must be said, if anything is said at all. But are not such illustrations of the Sacred Humanity more, far, far more than interesting?

Among the various illustrations of the divine mystery of the Incarnation, which are furnished by the Lives of the Saints must be reckoned their mysterious vicarious sufferings, and still more their mysterious participation in the sufferings of our Lord Himself, from the Holy Innocents downwards, as if fulfilling those hard words of S. Paul about filling up the lack of the sufferings of Christ, and

showing what a mystery suffering is. In Father Amelot's Life of Sister Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament this is wonderfully brought out. She suffered for sinners for some fourteen or fifteen months, first the tortures of one martyr, then of another. Her bones were actually heard to crack as if she were being broken on the wheel. So Sister Marie Angelique, whose Life Boudon has written, not only suffered the pain of stoning on S. Stephen's day, but the bruises were visible to others. On S. Sebastian's day some invisible power fastened her hands behind her back, and her body was pierced with arrow wounds. On S. Laurence's day her flesh gradually assumed the appearance of being burnt and roasted, while she suffered most excruciating tortures. In the Life of S. Catherine of Ricci, we read as follows (page 90): "One of the souls in Purgatory, for which she suffered a great deal, was that of a prince and ruler, for whom she had offered during his life-time many prayers, fasts, and penances, lest he should be condemned to hell; they had evidently been accepted, for before his death he gave great signs of a change of life, and a firm resolution to spend the remainder of it in the holy fear of God, and he passed in this excellent frame of mind from this world to Purgatory; and as soon as this fact was revealed to Catherine in answer to the prayers she made to that effect, she offered to suffer in her own person all the punishments that the Divine justice was about to inflict on him. Her petition was granted, and the prince's soul raised to enjoy God's glory, but at the same time Catherine's torments began; they

lasted forty days, and were so extraordinary, that the doctors, perceiving them to be beyond the range of their art, concluded that they were sent by God to enable her to atone for some soul in Purgatory. The account given by those who witnessed them, was that her body appeared as if it were covered by a number of blisters full of serum, which boiled as though it was over a fire. They also emitted such excessive heat, that the cell seemed on fire, and no one could remain in it many moments without going out to take breath. It was easy to see that her flesh was burning; her tongue was like a red hot iron, and after the effervescence subsided, it had the appearance of having been roasted; but after a short interval the blisters rose again, bringing the same heat with them; yet they could not impair the joyousness of her face, or the serenity of her mind, which rejoiced in the midst of these fiery torments."

While speaking of the Incarnation, we should not omit to suggest the illustrations of the doctrine and secrets of the Blessed Sacrament, which the lives of the Saints afford. How are all things found in that most dear mystery? It has been well said that of old, "Adam learned the science of God by infusion in the earthly paradise, Solomon in his sleep by means of an ecstasy, S. Paul by a rapture in the third heaven, S. Peter by a revelation in the bosom of the eternal Father, Magdalen at the feet of Jesus by an effusion of love, S. Thomas at the side of Jesus by a divine touch, and the beloved disciple on his Master's bosom in a sweet mystic slumber." But now, all these things are found in the Blessed

Sacrament. Father Da Ponte visited the Blessed Sacrament so often, that his biographer says it would have been the sole employment of most men. Some saints have been able to detect the presence of the Blessed Sacrament by the sense of smell, others have tasted all manner of unearthly savours in It, others have seen constant visions in It, others have heard voices from It. But we may sum up all in Father Nouet's words, speaking of the Blessed Sacrament, "As that uncreated Object is infinitely amiable, and has an infinite virtue to draw and ravish to Himself, as well as to inflame the highest part of the will, it often happens that He draws the spirit of the lover with a force so powerful, so predominant, and yet withal so sweet, in the riches of His glory, in the ocean of His delights and His beatitude, that the point of the soul is altogether absorbed, and drowned in the abyss of the Divinity; in such a way that the admiration, the regard, the love, the taste, the complacency which the soul has for its Object, cause it to faint away, and make it so attentively and strongly engrossed in the Divinity, that the activity of all the inferior senses is suspended, all their harmony is frozen, the whole body is stupified; all the limbs become stiff, and lose their power of motion, the whole mass of flesh becomes like an immovable trunk, and the man lives no longer an animal or human life, but simply a life intellectual and deiform. We have examples in the books and lives of the saints; but if any are slow to believe them, they may see this effect with their own eyes in many religious and secular persons of both sexes, to whom this happens in saying mass,

or communicating, or assisting at the divine mysteries.”

Some writers, even among those who do not follow the opinion that each angel is a distinct species, teach that the grace of each angel is quite distinct and different from the graces of the others. Thus, when we consider the countless myriads of those beautiful spirits, we gain a glimpse of the abundance and magnificence of God, and of the ravishing beauty of the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, in whom every one of these multitudinous and nameless graces were in their fountain and their plenitude. This is a field of contemplation which we cannot traverse in this life. But we have a foretaste of it in pondering the singular graces of some of God’s chosen saints. One will touch one class of minds, and one another. Some are struck by Father Caraffa’s grace, to be for forty years as if he were in the recollected fervour of a retreat; others again by the Virgin Margaret of Beaune, who became deaf whenever any one was criticizing the absent; others by S. Catherine of Genoa, who could hardly stand when she heard the word “*sin*” mentioned. But all these graces, or rather the graces which human weakness thus expresses, were in plenitude in Jesus. All this interior variety of His spouses, these graces which have no names in the schools, and no descriptions in theology, are but faint lights, weakened by mist, from the brightness of that Humanity which was assumed by Him who was “begotten before Lucifer in the splendours of the saints.” “Such glory have all His saints,” who, as is said of Benjamin in Deuteronomy, as “the best beloved of the Lord, shall dwell confidently in



Him, as in a bridechamber shall he abide all the day long, and between his shoulders shall be rest."

And do not all these things interest us? and do they not rebuke the spirit of the world within us? If not, have we *quite* broken with the world? and are our heart and treasure altogether where they should be? We are not such fools as to dream we even look like saints; but are we in the midst of the world's noisy perturbations resting Benjamin's rest ranking amid those "quiet ones," whom S. Laurence Justinian describes with their "humble prayer, tearful through compunction, abounding in thanksgiving, joyous with an exulting spirit, glittering with the knowledge of God, flaming with the fires of love, and whose delectable occupation is in the divine praises?"

While we are speaking of illustrations of our dear Lord and His grace, we will venture, perhaps at the risk of a smile, or a charge of exaggeration, to quote a passage from the life of the Blessed Benvenuta. It is as follows, p. 323.\* "Thus Christ manifested Himself to her once in the Church of S. Stephen, which was close to her house, and where she used some time of the day to say the prayers she had not time to finish in the Church of the Blessed Dominic. Whenever the rain or any other impediment prevented her from going to S. Dominic's, she was accustomed to pray in this church, which is well fitted for pious retirement, being far from the houses and traffic of men, and therefore very quiet. Here she saw a little boy of most sanctified beauty, and with

\* Where lives of the Saints are quoted only by pages, it is from the volumes of the Oratorian Lives that we are quoting.

a most joyful aspect. Benvenuta called him to her, and began to amuse him with pious words. Among other words she said to him, 'Have you a mother?' to which he replied, 'Have you a mother?' and she said, 'No! I have none,' for her mother had recently died. But he said, 'I have indeed a mother.' She enquired, 'Do you know the Hail Mary?' and he answered, 'Do you know it too?' She said that she knew it, and the child said, 'Now will you say it?' She began, 'Hail, Mary! full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus—' at this last word the Child said, 'And I am He,' and immediately disappeared." Now two things strike us about this vision. First, that it is surpassingly beautiful, and full of an air of divinity. Just as artists contemplate some fragment of old Greek sculpture, and a living fountain of beauty seems to flow from it into their minds, and they detect the characteristics of some master whom they admire, and they are filled with new ideas, and their minds are enlarged by their intelligent enthusiasm, so does it seem to us that this vision is full of Jesus, full of God's way, and therefore full of graceful unworldliness and of the gift of tears. Secondly, what an illustration it is of those words of Scripture, *Sermoinatio ejus cum simplicibus*, as if they could be rendered, And His *gossip* is with the simple. But on this subject we may refer to the introduction from Guilloré, which we prefixed to the Lives of the Companions of S. Alphonso, in order to anticipate objections to the memoir of the Blessed Gerard Majella.

7. Here is another source of interest, which would be a subject for a dissertation, the way in which Holy Scripture is illustrated by what we read in the lives of the Saints, and especially of the most mystical ones; and the way also in which words of Scripture seem to work miracles on the Saints, as if they were alive, and had power and spirit in them, because they were revealed words.

We may, at least, allude to a few instances of this illustration of Scripture, which may help to show also how important the study of the Divine Oracles is as a spiritual exercise. First of all take the words, Out of the mouths of infants and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise, which also express a principle of God's way of dealing. When the holy Veronica Giuliani calls out against the false weights, when the infant at Florence cries out, Saint! Saint! at S. Philip Benizi, when so many saints in their infancy refused the breast on Fridays, as if to teach a lesson to those who despise the precepts of the Church, what a meaning we have for the words in question!

The following quotation is from Benedict XIV. "It is written in Genesis, viii. 21, 'The imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth,' wherefore Tobias is praised in the sacred volume, because, 'when he was younger.....yet did he no childish thing in his work,' and when he became a father, and had a son, 'from his infancy he taught him to fear God, and to abstain from all sin.' The Church praises some of the Saints, because by the innocence and sobriety of their conduct, even in their tender

years they gave indications of their future sanctity. Thus we read in the lections, which the whole Church recites in the offices of S. Antony of Lisbon, S. Bernardine of Sienna, S. Vincent Ferrer, S. Peter Alcantara, S. Norbert, S. Raymund Nonnatus, S. Bruno, and S. Francis of Sales. Indications of future sanctity in tender years, are collected from neglect of childish amusements and the pleasures of the world, from mercy towards the poor, and self-denial: as we learn from the lections which the whole Church recites in the offices of S. Nicholas Tolentino, and S. Felix of Valois, with which agree the Bulls of the Canonization of S. Rose of Lima, S. Thomas of Villanova, and S. Thomas of Hereford: 'Mercy towards the poor grew with him from his infancy,' according to the saying of Job, xxxi. 18. 'From my infancy mercy grew up with me.' " (Heroic Virtue, ii. 394, 395.)

Both in the Old and New Testaments we have much about the influence of the servants of God over the animals, as in the case of Daniel and Elias. We have S. John Baptist living for years with the wild beasts in the wilderness, and our Lord Himself being with them forty days. So we find the saints, especially those whose innocence is remarkable, exercising the empire of un-fallen man over the creatures. A lion digs a grave for the hermit Paul. Those Franciscan saints, who were distinguished by a special devotion to the Holy Ghost, and who all died on the Feast of Pentecost, held communion with and gave familiar commands to the creatures. The Lives of S. Joseph of Cupertino and the B. Sebastian of Apparizio are

full of instances. Nay, so familiar and playful was the power, that in the Chronicles of the Congregation of the Oratory, we are told that when Father Grassi of Fermo was dining under a tree at a pleasure-party, he bade a nightingale to perch upon the table, and sing to them all the while. How does all this illustrate those beautiful words of Eliphaz: "Thou shalt not be afraid of the beasts of the earth. But thou shalt have a covenant with the stones of the lands, and the beasts of the earth shall be at peace with thee: and thou shalt know that thy tabernacle is in peace, and visiting thy beauty thou shalt not sin."

The difficulties of the Old Testament history also receive great illumination from the Lives of the Saints, as well in the mixture, or rather interference of the supernatural with the natural, as in the actions which seem of dubious propriety, and are gleams of higher principles and more heavenly maxims of conduct, and more clear acknowledgments of the Divine Supremacy.

Again, the whole subject of the Evangelical Counsels finds its plainest and amplest commentary in the Lives of the Saints. The practice of poverty and the various startling manifestations of unworldliness which we find in them are cases in point. Those words about hating our father and mother, which our Lord, when He said them, must have meant for so many foreseen souls, can hardly be expounded in words; they require the actions of the saints to show what the King of saints intended. We can understand them better in the practice of S. Thomas Aquinas, S. Francis of Assisi, and S.



Peter of Alcantara, than in the pages of Tostatus, or of Cornelius à Lapide. So, Blessed are they who are not scandalized in Me, finds its truest exposition in the Lives of the Saints of God, maltreated and misapprehended like our Lord Himself: so that, strange and painful as it sounds, they who are already in heaven are stumbling-blocks to many on their road there, and are so by the very things which landed them in heaven.

There is another thing in Scripture of the deepest interest, which is at once illuminated and beautified by the Lives of the Saints. It is that doctrine of His servants being transformed into our Lord Himself by a mystical transformation: as when the Apostle says, "I live, yet not I, but the Lord Jesus liveth in me; and again, I bear about in my body the stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ," with parallel passages. We need not dwell on the mysterious similitude of the Patriarch S. Francis to Jesus, as it is so well known. But let us weigh the following illustrations of this doctrine. Boudon tells us, in the dedication to the *L'Homme de Dieu*, that S. Ignatius, since his death, is wont to appear with his face veiled, and the Name of Jesus glistening on his breast; just as in his eagerness to have his life hidden with Christ in God, he prayed that his confessor might die before him, so that the world might never know the graces he had received, which made our dear S. Philip say, when he read the Life of his friend S. Ignatius, that not the one half was told, as the queen of the South said of Solomon's magnificence.

Consider also the following passage from the life

of S. Catherine of Ricci (p. 63). "What happened to Sister Maria Gabriella Mascalzoni, was, beyond comparison, more wonderful. Although she loved our Saint much, and had heard her sanctity declared by so many eminent men, her mind did not seem at rest concerning the truth of her ecstasies; wherefore, on one occasion, when she found her alone in the Oratory in an ecstasy, and no one was by, she knelt down before her, and earnestly prayed that the Lord might quiet her doubts, when raising her eyes to the Saint's face she saw it changed into that of our Lord crucified, with hair and beard like His. She was frightened at this, and would have fled, but the Saint, still in ecstasy, stopped her, and placing her face near her breast, said to her, 'Which do you think I am—Sister Catherine or Jesus?' Still more frightened at this speech, she broke out into a flood of tears, and answered in a loud voice, 'You are Jesus;' and when the same question was repeated three times, she gave the same answer; and not only was her fear changed into joy, but also her doubts into a certainty, that Catherine's ecstasies were the work of God, and not of the devil, as she herself asserted afterwards to the other nuns; moreover, when Sister Catherine was asked by her guardian, to whom she was obliged to answer the truth, how such a change of countenance could happen, she replied according to the teaching of S. Paul, 'Do you not know that God abideth in those who abide in Him?' " So also S. Theresa says it seemed sometimes as if she did not live, as if she did not speak, as if she had no will, but that some

one within her governed her and ruled her actions ; and our Lord appeared to her, and said, "My daughter, the soul that gives up everything to be more entirely mine, lives no longer, but it is I who live in it." So Da Ponte says in his journal (Life, p. 271), "It appears to me that God dwells within me, so united in action, that being two, we seem but one ; whilst I never undertake anything, but He also acts with me." S. Catherine of Siena, trying to persuade her confessor of the truth of this transformation, prayed our Lord to make him understand it ; and in an instant the confessor saw S. Catherine's face transfigured into that of our Lord. Father S. Jure, in his life of Monsieur de Renty, says that a person of great piety, looking one day on M. de Renty, saw his face change into that of Jesus Christ. So also Boudon tells us that several times the figure of Jesus appeared externally in F. Surin, and was witnessed with great awe and devotion by many persons. The following words are taken from the account Surin gave of himself by obedience to his superiors. "I then felt Jesus Christ in me, penetrating all my members in an inexplicable manner, so that it seemed as if my soul was in glory. This visit of Jesus Christ penetrated to the very bottom of my soul. But this is not all. It seemed as if my very body had become the flesh of Jesus Christ, so that I had a great respect for my body. This view ravished my soul for more than twenty years. When, without thinking of it, I looked at my arms and my hands, I saw an object so divine and so august, that I have no terms in which to couch it. The soul found in it an

elevation and a sweetness so heavenly, that nothing approaches it." Who that reads these things does not think of our Blessed Lord's prayer, that they may be one, as Thou Father in me, and I in Thee ? And oh ! who does not feel how much safer and sweeter for us the common ways, the lowly walks, the food of faith, where we know where we are and what we are, than these giddy heights of bewildering view, and smooth precipices, with no hold-fast or footing, and thin air that makes us bleed while we breathe ? and was not S. Philip right, who said, He who desires ecstasies knows not what he desires ?

Thus of St. Camillus, that sweet spirit dwelling in rough manners, and who was a spiritual son of S. Philip, it is said so touchingly (Life i: 354), " He also wished his religious to be well grounded in the virtue of humility, and frequently gave them beautiful instructions upon it. One day he heard them talking of a certain priest, who was in great trouble through some spiritual illusions ; he broke out into sighs, and said, " O my fathers, what a good thing it is to walk in the beaten track, which is to keep the commandments of God, and to practise the true virtues, and especially charity and humility. And again (p. 373), " He frequently offered to the eternal Father the bitter passion of His Son, for the sins of the whole world, and for the necessities of the Holy Church. His principal petition, which he made most importunately, was, that he would cleanse his soul from every stain of sin, and bring it back to its state of baptismal innocence. At the same time he took every pains

to keep himself from even the slightest shadow of sin. He did not court sublime flights in his prayer, but shut himself up in the wounded side of Jesus, and there, like a tender dove in its nest in the ruins, he employed himself in sweet colloquies with his Lord, and in beseeching Him to grant him every grace. Dead to everything of the world, and living only to glorify the goodness of God, he never sought delight or sweetness in his prayers, but his whole intention was directed to gain new strength to spend in his grand undertaking of saving souls."

It is very interesting to find, when we can do so, what may be called the middle term between the directly supernatural and the loftier operations of the natural faculties, to watch nature, and make it sit for its picture, just where it is running into the supernatural. This may sometimes be done, and nothing throws such light on mystical theology. It will explain our meaning to quote a Protestant interpretation of the Stigmata of S. Francis.

" So with intense desire

And inward recollection now he strove  
By recitation of the blessed Creeds  
To imprint a lively image of the Lord  
Upon his spirit; with unflagging strain  
And unrelaxing grasp of thought he held  
His mind long poised upon each wondrous clause,  
Each gracious lineament of saving truth,  
Until the countenance of the Written Faith  
Broke forth in silent voices, and each word  
Sang like a trumpet in his inmost soul:  
And with the ringing sound his fleshy heart  
Glowed like a furnace, till the Type of Him  
Whose love it echoed was annealed thereon.

Even so, when on the Tuscan Apennine  
Descending autumn down the beechwood slope  
Her russet mantle trailed, S. Francis knelt;  
His spirit hung in steadfast rapture far



Above the atmosphere of vocal prayer,  
While, 'twixt the beamy seraph's folded wings  
He saw the Sacred Effigy depending,  
And from the gracious Wounds, five Wells of health  
To stanch the sensual issues of our sins,  
There came five rays of light, which was not born  
Of sun or moon, but from that Orb detached  
That sheds on Sion's streets eternal day;—  
The city undisclosed, whose outlines faint  
Tremble with indistinct pulsation now,  
Like sunset quivering on the clouds of night,  
Upon the bosom of the earthly church.  
Those starry pencils on his fleshy frame,  
By cleansing fast and vigil now sublimed,  
Haply by love, too, partially transformed  
As, when the Judgment Fire is passed, all flesh  
Shall be,—played for a little while, and left,  
By their sharp radiance copied to the life,  
The Saviour's awful Wounds. Such solemn power  
Imagination on the bodily limbs  
Usurps, concurring with intensest love  
And long unbroken singleness of thought  
And with miraculous effort outwardly  
Reveals the habitual aspect of the heart,  
Surely by gracious heaven not disallowed.  
Thus, by a hundred witnessed, Francis came  
Down from Alvernia, like a vessel sealed,  
And stigmatized in fashion as his Lord."

Whatever comes of this metaphysical view of the great Patriarch's stigmata, and the theory that would mingle the natural with the supernatural in such an eminent grace as this, there is a very curious approach of nature in the life of S. Camillus of Lellis, to that supernatural appearance of Jesus in the lineaments of His creatures, just quoted from the lives of S. Catherine of Ricci, Monsieur de Renty, and Father Surin. It is faith forcing nature beyond itself, and almost over the boundary; supernatural in one sense, as grace always is, but not supernatural in the sense of mystical gifts. We read of S. Camillus as follows: (Life, i. 247.) "This tender

compassion of his towards the sick arose from his contemplating in them the Person of Jesus Christ. Thus when he was feeding them, he would often kneel down and uncover his head; *sometimes he would even ask them for grace and for the pardon of his sins, as though they were so many images of Jesus.* One night his companion found him in the hospital of Santo Spirito, on his knees before a sick person who had a gangrene in his mouth, the odour of which was quite unbearable, and yet Camillus, with his face close to his, kept saying, ‘My Lord, my soul, what can I do to serve Thee?’ and he used other expressions, so tender, that it was easy to perceive that in the person of the poor sick man, he imagined himself to be serving his beloved Redeemer. This holy imagination would carry him off into ecstasy, so that his face would be all on fire, and he would go leaping and dancing through the hospital without being aware of it. His companion testifies upon oath that he has often and often seen him thus carried off into ecstasy while he was serving the sick; so that we must suppose that his eyes were divinely illuminated to behold in the countenances of the most wretched creatures the lineaments of the King of glory.”

To these illustrations of Scripture, we may add as another source of interest in the lives of the Saints, the light thrown by the biographies of the older Saints on the modern fashions of the spiritual life, as when we find in the life of the abbess S. Segolena, in Mabillon, the practice of confessing venial sins in the eighth century, and a very interesting essay might be written on the influence of

the old Fathers of the Desert, upon the Saints of the last three centuries, whether by means of their lives, or through the Collations of Cassian.

Even these things then, which do not belong to our own spiritual lives, and which it would be delusion in us to aspire to, are not without solid practical advantage to ourselves. It is hard not to act on mere natural motives and impulses, it is hard neither to heed nor hearken to the world's judgment, and it is harder still to kill that self-love which is within us, as if it were the very blood of our veins, or the very soul of our body. Whatever, therefore, has the effect of making us unworldly, and of familiarizing us with the associations of another world, is a real help to us, however humble our attainments may be, even in the raw beginnings of a spiritual life. When our minds become saturated with the lives of the Saints, their admirable no less than their imitable features, we are at least on the road, however far from the term, of that state which Richard of S. Victor describes. We lose our interest in the world, and as men say reproachfully of us, take no active interest in anything but God and the Church. "The soul," says Richard, "loves but one thing. It has an affection but for one thing. It burns with a passion but for one thing. It desires but one thing. It sighs but for one thing. It breathes but for one thing. It reposes but in one thing. It feeds itself on but one thing. It is satisfied only by one thing. Nothing seems to it sweet, or of pleasant savour, which is not seasoned with one thing, which is the object of its love. This chases away every other desire; this excludes

all other application; this violently tears off every other exercise, which the soul sees cannot subserve its single desire. Whatever the soul does, whatever it says, whatever it thinks, all seems good for nothing, nay, even unbearable, if it does not tend simply to the object of its desire." So it was that a thrill of joy went through S. Theresa whenever she heard the clock strike, because she was one hour nearer to Jesus and eternity. So it was that the Blessed Mary of Oignies sang for three whole days songs of seraphic desire, and then sang more sweetly still, "How beautiful art Thou, O Lord, our king ! Alleluia !" and her chaste soul passed like a dove to the bosom of her Spouse. So it was that young S. Stanislas lay with the cold wet cloths upon his chest, because the boy was burning away with the desire of Jesus and Mary. So it was, and this is much to our purpose, that S. Ignatius climbed to the house-top to pray, because with a holy childishness he said he liked to feel himself somewhat nearer heaven; and then when he gazed upon the sky, he wept, and sighed, and languished with love, and was often overheard to say in quite piteous accents, "O earth ! how vile it seems to me when I look on heaven !"

What we have said then seems to amount to this. There are two objections, urged for the most part by different persons, to the Lives of the Saints, on the ground of the want of interest. One concerns the *imitable* portion of the lives, which is said to lack literary, historical and psychological interest; the other has to do with the *admirable* portion, and not only questions the advisability of putting it

forward, but considers it destitute of practical interest to ordinary Catholics. So far as the first of these objections is concerned, it has been shown that the spiritual utility of these lives would be injured either by the change of form or by superior literary attraction, because that attraction could not be gained without the infusion of a different sort of interest, superseding the spiritual one. The best answer to the objection is by reminding the objector of the end with which the series professedly started. All works tell which keep true to their idea; but when they depart from it, through eager unthoughtful desire to please every one, their influence melts away. So far as the second objection is concerned, that has been met, not only by pointing to seven different sources of the most fascinating interest, but by showing that this interest is of a directly practical character, in that it supernaturalizes the mind, takes the brightness off worldly things, enlarges our views of God, and causes us to pant all the more, like hunted deer, after the fountain of the Eternal Country. May it all be for God's glory, and for the honour of His dear Saints and the manifold grace of Jesus Christ !

It is very difficult to defend anything without seeming to do so too exclusively; and people are quick to take an expression of sympathy with one work to be tantamount to a declaration of want of sympathy with another. We should be sorry if anything we have said should be construed into an indifference towards the literary and educational wants of English Catholics. No man can be guilty of a more unfortunate condemnation of himself



than such an indifference would involve. It is hard to conceive a scene of more thrilling interest than is now presented by the condition of the Catholic Church in England. Month after month it is growing more into shape and consistency. The papal gift, the new hierarchy, cannot but fructify. In the intelligent zeal of bishops, in the blameless toil of patient priests, in the seminaries, the orders, and the congregations, as well as in the works of charity and mercy, in the frequentation of the sacraments, and above all in the unanimous loyalty to the Holy See, we may behold abundant tokens of good, and thickening prophecies of a future, yet to be won by suffering, depression, reverses and endurance. The increased study of dogmatic theology and the sacred Canons, the growth and naturalization of countless beautiful devotions, and the great but blessed force of the spirit of asceticism, will bring forth fruit a hundred-fold, when we have patiently abided the taking root underground, which is to come first of all. No work is from God which is not slow. We need never despond if we remember this.

It is plain then that there are two kinds of work which we require, and which may be shortly summed up in the two words, intellectual and ascetical. It would be foolish to suppose that in a country like England we do not need literary influence, and that not only in the hope of directly Catholic literature, but also, in the Catholic way of looking at other literature. He is doing a pious work, provided God's glory is his motive, who is trying in anyway to help forward the growth of Catholic literature, or Catholic criticism, or Catholic

art, no matter which of the manifestations of art he may choose to take for his moderate and tolerant hobby. Education, the great question of the day all the world over, comes under this head of intellectual work. It would be hard to find words which could really exaggerate the importance of this intellectual work for English Catholics. Without it there is a clearly defined limit to our success. Without it victory never can be ours; and without it, failure, narrowness, pusillanimity, division, and disgrace, are inevitable. But under this head, and in this work, we cannot reckon the present series of *Lives of the Saints*; they were never meant to be so reckoned; and to find fault with them, because they are obviously falling short of what they should be if they were intended for an intellectual work, may perhaps, quite contrary to the intention of the critics themselves, frustrate in some degree the spiritual work they were intended to do, and with which, in its own sphere and rightly apprehended, those critics have a warm and genuine sympathy. We work at our own work, and sympathise at the same time most cordially with their work, though except in an indirect way it is no help or furtherance to ours. They also work at their work, and, let us hope, have an affectionate appreciation of ours, though it is no sort of assistance to them.

The intellectual work, therefore, is not the sole work we require. There is the ascetical work as well. This includes the transplanting and naturalizing of the devotions of Catholic countries, the study of ascetical and mystical theology, the science of mental prayer, the secrets of heroic virtue, the

knowledge of the saints and all that province of tastes, sympathies and instincts about the supernatural, which hagiology brings along with it, the cultivation of the contemplative institutes, and the formation of a school of spiritual direction. Not that any of these things are new amongst us. But who will say they have yet come to their beautiful perfection? Nay, were they ever known to come to their perfection in a missionary country? Even the virtues of the Jesuit Paraguay or the old Franciscan California were far other things. Do they not require for their legitimate development the genial shadow of the divine hierarchy, the needful pressure of a real discipline, the majestic presence of the Sacred Canons and that old law which is hardly a mere human creation, and the secure light of scholastic science round about them to guard them from delusion? If so, they will grow with our hierarchy, and the study of Canon Law will gage the progress of mystical theology.

Now it is to this department of work that the series of the Lives of the Saints belongs; and we are bold enough to maintain that not only is literary and artistic perfection not needed in this department of work, but they are more likely to be prejudicial to it. And this, not only because literary endeavour would tend to confound the intellectual and ascetical works together, but would introduce into the latter an uncongenial and so probably a destructive spirit. Who does not know that there is not a more difficult problem in the whole spiritual life than the reconciliation of the literary spirit with the spirit of prayer, or the anguish which the solu-

tion of this problem often brings along with it? Who that has read much of ascetical and mystical theology, but can call to mind the almost countless passages in which, with a jealousy that looks at first sight strange and in excess, the writers warn us against literary art or studious style? Who does not remember in the history of heresies the seduction of the literary spirit, and its affinity with false doctrine? Language has been called the weapon of heretics. In works on the exact sciences we do not look for the embellishments of rhetoric, or the rhythm of composition; and the axioms of Euclid would read very oddly in the equipoise of genuine Johnsonian sentences. So also is it with spiritual books, and treatises of ascetical theology. If literary ornament is worth anything, it must attract the reader's attention; and we naturally wish to attract his attention in proportion as we fear his want of interest in the subject matter. The ornament is the gilding of the pill. The will is interesting enough to the legatee, and the act of parliament to the magistrate, without the charms of style. So with spiritual books. They are not read for their intellectual interest, neither have we any object in coaxing simply intellectual people to read them, as we have to captivate them with Catholic history, or philosophy, or even polemics. Nay, whatever attraction there is in them over and above their subject matter, is in reality a distraction; and so an injury. And is not the tradition of the saints about spiritual reading, of which several instances have been given in the foregoing pages, quite in accordance with all this?

We do not mean to say that the literary spirit is necessarily fatal to the spirit of prayer. The Dominican saints teach us the contrary. So does the peculiarly mystical character of piety of the almost canonized Bellarmine. And Suarez with his twenty-one double-columned folios, his community acts of Jesuit life, and his seven daily hours of mental prayer to boot. And Cardinal de Lugo, going in his subtle perplexities to consult the boyish novice, John Bercmans, that God might reveal to the prayers of the novice the science withheld from his own comprehensive intellect. The whole doctrine about infused science is but an illustration of the same. We do not want to exaggerate the matter, but only that the view should be admitted for what it is worth. Each of the two departments of work, of which we are speaking, have their own methods of attaining success, and they differ widely the one from the other. The ascetical work is effected rather by God than man, rather by grace than intellect, by prayer than argument. Hence there is a feeling of the utter infirmity of human means, as well as a very vivid experience of God's presence and co-operation, which interferes with the literary spirit, even in man's share of the work, and produces a sort of negligence and inartistical slovenliness, which some look on unfavourably, while to others it is a token of earnestness and reality. The works of S. John of the Cross may be quoted as an instance of this. Thus of S. Camillus, who was all for work, it is said, "He was very particular about the education of the young, and did not wish their spiritual fervour to be cooled by scientific studies,



nor their love of mortification and other virtues decreased by it." What are called among the Jesuits "Fathers of the Third Year" witness to the same truth. Thus also, though it may be thought to imply a condemnation of ourselves, one of S. Philip's first Oratorians says, "The spirit of the press (*lo spirito della stampa*) is uncongenial to the spirit of our congregation." He expressed a truth, though he did not mean to take from us the benefit of the inspired rule, *Omnia tempus habent, et suis spatiis transeunt universa sub cœlo*.

There are many difficulties about this question; and unintellectuality is very far indeed from being simplicity. Indeed it is very hard to be unintellectual and simple at the same time. It is perhaps not possible for a man to be harmless as a dove, in the Christian sense, if he is not first of all, and in the same sense, wise as a serpent. Ignorance or indolence often put in their claim to be considered simple; but this is merely stupid; and those who feel no intellectual aspirations to mortify can hardly be sagacious preceptors in that school of mortification. Such men can talk calmly out of their devout dulness; but their words go with no unction to those who are in real torture, because they cannot settle the balance of two quarrelsome responsibilities, the activity of the intellect, and the drawings of prayer.

What we are saying comes to this. The more literature the better, only in its place. We hardly want anything so much. And a religious order can be given up to literature, as the Dominicans prove, who in the number of Saints are said to be before

all the other orders. And speaking of our own kind of work, we repeat, that unless the ecclesiastical sciences flourish, high spirituality can never flourish either ; and be it remembered, it must be the ecclesiastical sciences in the wide and magnificent sense of the term, not the mere narrowness of moral theology, or the art, however useful, of not making mistakes in the confessional. Such knowledge as this, if exclusive, is far from being on a level with the exigencies of the times. Still everything in its place ; and there is surely some meaning in that sweet sad cry of Franciscan devotion, which has now grown into a proverb, O Paris ! Paris ! thou hast spoiled Assisi !

This must mean something, and history gives us examples. To say nothing of the emperor Julian, we have Eusebius in old times, and in more recent days Erasmus. If the Arian heresy was propagated and rooted by means of beautiful vernacular hymns, so who will say that the uncommon beauty and marvellous English of the Protestant bible is not one of the great strongholds of heresy in this country ? It lives on in the ear like a music that never can be forgotten, like the sound of church bells which the convert hardly knows how he can forego. Its felicities seem often to be almost things rather than mere words. It is part of the national mind, and the anchor of the national seriousness. Nay, it is worshipped with a positive idolatry, in extenuation of whose grotesque fanaticism its intrinsic beauty pleads availingly with the man of letters and the scholar. The memory of the dead passes into it. The potent traditions of childhood are stereo-

typed in its verses. The power of all the griefs and trials of a man is hidden beneath its words. It is the representative of his best moments, and all that there has been about him of soft, and gentle, and pure, and penitent, and good, speaks to him for ever out of his English Bible. It is his sacred thing which doubt never dimmed, and controversy never soiled. It has been to him all along as the silent, but O how intelligible voice, of his guardian angel; and in the length and breadth of the land there is not a Protestant, with one spark of religiousness about him, whose spiritual biography is not in his Saxon Bible. And all this is an unhallowed power! The extinction of the Establishment would be a less step towards the conquest of the national mind, than, if it were possible, (but we are speaking humanly, and in our ignorance,) to adopt that Bible, and correct it by the Vulgate. As it is, there is no blessing of the Church along with it, and who would dream that beauty was better than a blessing?

Has not the same thing been said of Luther's Bible in Germany? In both countries the language was in great measure settled by the translation, and literature almost started from it, at least vernacular literature; for we do not forget that Luther lamented that his friends would not let him throw Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, into the fire, and that Osian-der tells us that Stork taught that to learn human science was a sin. This was the lamentation of Erasmus. Heresy was nothing to him, nor the blaspheming of the Sacraments, nor the contempt of the Holy See, so long as all was literary, refined,

and polished. "I dislike," says he, "these gossellers on many accounts, but *chiefly* because, through their agency, literature everywhere languishes, lies drooping, and perishes; and yet without learning, what is a man's life? They love good cheer and a wife, for other things they care not a straw." (Mac-lachlan, p. 201.) What wonder that that man of infallible instincts, quicker than sight, plainer than hearing, more subtle than smell, the great Ignatius should forbid the works of Erasmus to be studied in his society?

Much to the purpose is the grave authority of the Blessed Pope Gregory. It is thus that he concludes the epistle to Leander, which stands as preface to his wonderful commentaries on Job. "I beg that in going through the statements of this work, you would not seek the foliage of eloquence therein: for by the Sacred Oracles the vanity of a barren wordiness is purposely debarred those that treat thereof, in that it is forbidden to plant a grove in the temple of God. And doubtless we are all of us aware, that as often as the over-rank crop shows stalks that abound in leaves, the grains of the ears are least filled and swelling. And hence that art of speaking itself, which is conveyed by rules of worldly training, I have despised to observe; for as the tenor of this epistle also will tell, I do not escape the collisions of metacism, nor do I avoid the confusion of barbarisms, and I slight the observing of situations and arrangements, and the cases of prepositions; for I account it very far from meet to submit the words of the Divine Oracle to the rules of Donatus. For neither are these observed

by any of the translators thereof, in the authoritative text of Holy Writ. Now as my exposition takes its origin from thence, it is plainly meet that this production, like a kind of offspring, should wear the likeness of its mother. Now it is the new translation that I comment on; but when a case to be proved requires it, I take now the new and now the old for testimony, that as the Apostolic See, over which I preside by ordinance of God, uses both, the labours of my undertaking may have the support of both." (Greg. Morals, Oxf. trans. pp. 10, 11.)

The lives of the saints, it was hoped, would be a fair contribution to the ascetical work of which we have spoken. It was thought that it would help forward every department of it very materially. And we have not been disappointed of our hope. It is now nearly seven years since the first steps were taken towards the publication. How many were the doubts, the difficulties, the disappointments! How many the fears, the thwartings, the despondencies, the beginnings of drawing back! The rooms at Oscott can witness, where the then coadjutor of the Central District combated the doubts and fears, made himself the foster-father of the series, and bore it triumphantly over obstacles, which less confidence in the goodness of the plan, less devotion to the later saints, many of whom were little known in England, and less generosity in staking his own name and credit on the soundness or discretion of a convert, never could have surmounted. There is a story told of the deathbed of Surius, that in the last agony all the blessed spirits,



and there were hosts of them, whose lives he had published, assisted and supported the dying man. May the saints of our series do the same for our kind patron, when His Eminence shall come to die, and it is but one of many reasons for trusting that day is far, far off, that the longer it shall be delayed, the more saints there shall be to lighten the darkness with their beautiful ministries !

Spiritual reading is the vestibule of prayer; and in a country like our own, where weary work is our austerity, it may often keep steady our spiritual life when bodily fatigue is too great for the toil of systematic meditation. When the temptation comes to the over-wrought labourer in our Lord's vineyard to seek recreation in the world or worldly news, and to fall back upon creatures for support and for repose, how often do the lives of the saints step in, and keep him quietly to God and holy thoughts ! And what a blessed office is this ! Yet these lives breathe asceticism ; and even when used as a spiritual recreation, they will make this spirit felt in the soul. Men catch asceticism from them as by contagion. And what shall we not do when we become ascetic ?

A priest's locomotive power is prayer. Unless it be sacraments that are needed, half an hour before the tabernacle will do more for his parish than days of the fret and fever of human activity. Intercession is more eloquent a thousand times than admonition. And if the mysteries of Jesus and Mary have not become familiar to him in all their many-sided aspects through daily persevering meditation, how shall he be a fluent preacher, or unction go out with his fluency, or his sermons make it always high-tide

in the confessional? And if he does not immolate active duties to the daily task, amply allowed for, of examen of conscience, above all particular examen, how shall he, who does not so much as suspect the secret meanness or duplicity of his own interior man, minister with sage humility and tender-hearted discernment to the scruples, the illusions, the pusillanimities of others? And how shall a priest have power with God, who has an interest in the world? And where shall he find a surer antidote against the circumambient pestilence of the secular atmosphere, than in the light airs of Paradise, which breathe forth from the sayings and the doings of the Saints? And what is all this but sweet asceticism?

Men have often wondered how religious orders get through so much work, especially when the mere observance of rule, and the discharge of community duties, occupy at least three or four hours of the day. While they are necessarily limited in the extent of work to which they apply themselves, there is often a completeness, intensity, success, and perseverance, about what they do, which seems disproportioned to the visible efforts made. It is the Unseen Arm that does it, the secret of Sampson, the spirit of asceticism. Here, again, the locomotive power is prayer, mortification, obedience, holy community. O the power of one community, one only, flourishing in strict observance! God only knows its might, and the day of judgment alone can adequately reveal its far-spreading, unsuspected benedictions. And how do the lives of the Saints invigorate and brace this spirit of observance! And this, too, is but sweet asceticism!

And blessed be God ! we have also amongst us some contemplative institutes. It was but a few weeks ago that we heard a prince and pastor of the Church congratulating himself that we had some communities, whom the zeal of the Lord's house was devouring in the silent thirst of prayer, rather than in the outpouring of the heart upon external works of mercy; for the country is all loose and out of joint for want of prayer. And we who are members of active communities,—we shall be scorched and withered away by the glare of the noonday toil, if we be not cooled by the abounding dews, and overshadowed by the gracious clouds of the cloistered and the contemplative? Is not prayer more than work, though there must be both work and prayer? Is not unction more than eloquence? Is not grace mightier than activity? Is not holiness downright power? Is not God's eye life, and the world's eye death? Is not the unseen more than the seen? Is not the watched conscience a charm to souls, and the neglected conscience the spring of rough words, sour looks, and the repelling of sinners? Does not the interior man preach without speaking, and can the distracted man ever be an Apostle? To disbelieve all this, is it not implicit Protestantism? And to believe it practically, what is it but sweet asceticism?

Yet it all runs counter to the habits of mind of a Protestant country. It gainsays national axioms, which ooze into us in spite of all our faith. Our instincts are stolen from the Church, while she is honoured with the allegiance of our understandings. Yet to be in sympathy, mere sympathy, with the

Church, seemed to S. Ignatius to be like all holiness; while to be out of sympathy, merely out of sympathy, with the Church, brought forth on this side of the Alps Jansenism and Josephism, and on the other side the illuminism of Naples and the Synod of Pistoja. Our tastes are Protestant while our worship is Catholic. Our sympathies do not warm to the supernatural, for English activity whirls us along, and who shall take sketches from the windows of an express train? God is slow, and He will not be hurried, and the supernatural must be looked at a second time to be sure it is not a delusion, and a third time to be worshipped for what it is, and then we have so fallen in love with it, that we cannot leave it nor pass on, and thus the world must go forward without us; and indeed why not? for is its journey's end ours also? But the lives of the Saints are a world of their own. There are the weights and the measures of the sanctuary. There the peace which is power, and the calmness which is activity. There the axioms of the Sacred Heart are the standards of all deeds; and the world's black is our white, and the world's white darker than black to us. And there is a fragrance of Paradise, though we see not yet its flowers. And a spirit in the air, which is health to the soul, for it is fresh from the heights of Sion. And "there is a sound of One going in the tops of the pear trees," and it is God "gone out *before us* to strike the army of the Philistines;" this is our activity. And there is "the Lord God walking in Paradise at the afternoon air," as it was all afternoons before the fall; and this is the sweet peace of our interior lives. It

is there, as from a hill top, facing into the illimitable sunset, that we get our first glimpse of the "many mansions of our Father's house," and sometimes of Him who is "preparing a place" for us therein. O how unutterably drear is the world's spreading night-cloud in the east, when we turn round upon its heavy purple folds, and let its cold gloom dash the golden light out of our eyes. But the Saints call us on; we must on; no turning round like Lot's wife; no turning back like the poor coward ploughman of the Gospel; the blessed spirits will lay kind hands on us, and drag us on, if need so be; our home, our goal, is in the glorious heart of that living sunset; we saw it, there was no mistake; it was plain; there were *many* mansions; we must on: we shall reach it by the time night has fallen on the earth.

Let it not seem rude or proud to quote the words of St. Augustin, (De Moribus Eccles. i. 31.) "I will say nothing of those whom I have spoken of above, those, who, concealed entirely from the sight of men, inhabit the most wild and desolate regions, content with bread alone, which is brought them at certain intervals of time, and water; but enjoying their closest intercourse with God, on whom their pure spirits rest, and most happy in the contemplation of His beauty, which cannot be perceived except by the intellect of the Saints; of these, I repeat, I will say nothing; for they seem to some, who little understand how much we are benefited by their dispositions in prayer, and by their life in the way of example, though we are not permitted to see them with our bodily eyes, to have retired from



human things much more than was their duty. But to discuss this matter would be tedious and useless; for how can this exalted height of sanctity, if it be not spontaneously honoured and admired, be so through our speaking?"

We fear we have been long; but indeed the sketch threatened to turn into a volume.

Now all these things which have been hinted at are quite independent of the literary interest men desire to find in the Lives of the Saints. Literature has its place. It is not easy to exaggerate its importance. But that which has its place has therefore its limits. Protestant habits of mind drag us along with them, and make us enlarge these limits unduly; for Protestantism, which does not conceive of grace, cannot conceive of the propagation of opinions otherwise than by intellectual influence, or by a sort of agitation which does not in reality spread opinions, but only swell a party. Men catch the faith by contagion, as well as submit to it through reasoning; or in other words, God is pleased to give it in as many ways as there are many minds of men. He would either be very inconsiderate, or care little about God's glory, who should be cold in his desire for intellectual activity and a Catholic literature in England. Yet when we are busied with the Saints, we are dealing with men, the motto of whose lives might rather be the Psalmist's words: *Quoniam non cognovi litteraturam, introibo in potentias Domini.*

F. W. F.

*The London Oratory.*

*Feast of S. John of the Cross.*

1852,

